

# FirstGlimpse™

FirstGlimpseMag.com

## The Ultimate Digital Photo Studio



Create your own digital photo studio with Canon's new Digital Rebel XTi camera and PIXMA iP6700D photo printer. Find out how on page 50!

January 2007  
\$3.50 U.S. • \$4.99 Canada



### Our Complete Digital Camera Buying Guide

### Top 5 Things To Know About HDTV

### Digital TV: What It Means For You



# JVC's Ear Bud Headphones

## HAFX33 Marshmallow Headphone

Available in five different fun fashionable colors. Comfortable and lightweight, these ambient sound-isolating headphones include adaptive foam inserts for improved sound and a perfect fit! MSRP: \$19.99

**Features:** Frequency response: 16 to 20,000Hz  
Sensitivity: 109 dB/mW  
Cord length: 3.9 ft.  
Weight: 0.21 oz  
Gold plated mini-plug

## HAF120 Gummy Headphone

Available in seven different fun fashionable colors and constructed with elastomer, a new material that promises a comfortable fit. MSRP: \$9.99

**Features:** Frequency response: 16 to 20,000Hz  
Sensitivity: 109 dB/mW  
Cord length: 3.9 ft  
Weight: 0.19 oz  
L-shape gold plated mini-plug





# FirstGlimpse™

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There are lots of reasons to love digital cameras, but perhaps the most important is the fact that they let you share and cherish the most important moments of your life. That's a big responsibility for one small device, and the task of choosing a digital camera shouldn't be taken lightly. In this month's issue, we tell you exactly what you should look for when shopping for your new digital camera.

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### Cover Story

- 50 The Best Of Both Worlds**  
Canon's Rebel XTi Satisfies Your Longing For Digital Convenience & SLR Functionality

#### On Our Cover:

Featured on our cover this month is the Canon Digital Rebel XTi (\$899.99; [www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)) and PIXMA MP600 photo printer (\$199.99; [www.canon.com](http://www.canon.com)).



## Open

There's always something new, interesting, and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *First Glimpse*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

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## Editor's Note

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Digital cameras are one of my favorite types of CE devices. With film cameras, I had to be choosy with my shots, but a casual, creative freedom comes with using a digital camera. When I'm sorting through my shots after I've uploaded them on my computer, I'm bound to find several really special ones that I want to print and share with family and friends.

And that is where the real fun starts. According to Paul Niebeling, senior domain planner for digital imaging at Best Buy, it's a good idea for digital camera users to focus as much on what they plan to do with their photos after they take them as they do on taking the photos in the first place. It's important to factor this into your digital camera purchase, as well. For example, a good-quality home photo printer is a must-have, and no longer do those printers limit you to 4x6- or 3x5-inch prints; many on today's market can even print on canvas. A good photo-editing suite will also allow you to improve your photos' color, lighting, and contrast and add impressive artistic elements to them. Both of these tools, which

you might not consider when you buy your digital camera, let you maximize your digital camera experience—as well as create gorgeous pieces of artwork.

If buying a new digital camera will be a priority for you in 2007, you're in luck: There are dozens of excellent-quality, affordable models from which to choose. Whatever you decide to purchase, make sure to leave room in your budget for a memory card, an extra battery, a bag, a photo printer, and photo-editing software.

Live well, friends.

Katie Sommer  
Editor, *First Glimpse*  
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## First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.

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## Canon SD900

MSRP: \$499.99

[www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores  
and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## Beauty & Power In Harmony

With its sinuous, perpetual-curve design elegantly clad in pure titanium, the PowerShot SD900 ELPH is visually arresting. But what's inside is just as impressive: a powerful 10MP CCD, 3X optical zoom, and newly developed DIGIC III Image Processor. Top-level functionality puts you at the forefront of digital technology, with expanded low-light shooting capability, a built-in digital teleconverter, and futuristic Face Detection technology for incredible group shots.

### High Resolution, Titanium Body

Pure titanium gives the PowerShot SD900 Digital ELPH impeccable presence and style. The evolution of Canon's Perpetual Curve design is a stunning aesthetic achievement.

The resolution gives your images an ultra-rich level of depth and detail and lets you enlarge and crop at will.

The camera's powerful 3X optical zoom utilizes Canon's industry dominance in optic technology to deliver quick response, brilliant clarity, and pure, true color.

### Maximum Quality & Performance

The camera's DIGIC III Image Processor with Face Detection Technology gives users superior image quality, fast operation, and low power consumption.

The camera's 2.5-inch LCD gives you the big picture, whether you're shooting, reviewing, or showing off your images. This high-resolution screen offers a crisp, clear picture



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Special Product Section



and wide viewing angle to make shooting, playback, and using the camera's menu functions especially convenient. The clear and bright LCD also features Night Display for easy viewing in low light.

## The Complete Print Solution

The PowerShot SD900 Digital ELPH's Print/Share button makes direct printing easier than ever. Simply connect the SD900 Digital ELPH to a Canon CP, SELPHY, or PIXMA Photo Printer or any PictBridge-compatible photo printer, press the lighted Print/Share button, and print. Also use the Print/Share button to transfer images to a computer (Windows® and Macintosh®).

Print your own ID photos in 28 sizes or use the Movie Print function to output multiple stills from a recorded movie on a single sheet with a Canon SELPHY Compact Photo Printer.

# Canon

**Canon PIXMA mini260**

MSRP: \$199.99

[www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)



## Quick, Portable & Easy Photo Printing

Instead of only printing photos where your computer is, print where you are. The kitchen. The TV room. Even in the backyard, using the optional battery. You can print directly from compatible memory cards, digital cameras, Bluetooth devices, even your camera phone. Its new Easy-Scroll Wheel makes operation easy, and the 2.5-inch TFT display lets you preview your images in high definition before printing. And thanks to its patented print head technology, you'll be amazed at your results.

Exceptional resolution (up to 9,600 x 2,400 dpi) and more nozzles equal better quality, and the microscopic ink droplets

produce exceptionally detailed photos. The 2.5-inch high-definition TFT display delivers sharp previews of your images, viewable from up to a 170-degree angle.

The memory card slot lets you print photos directly from the camera (no computer needed!), and you can also print wirelessly from your IR-enabled mobile phone.

# Canon



# FirstGlimpse™

Special Product Section



## Canon HV10 HD Camcorder

MSRP: \$1,299

[www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores  
and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## High-Definition Camcorder

The name “Canon” has always meant cameras with optical excellence, advanced image processing, superb performance, and the latest in technological advancements. Canon’s new HV10 high-definition video camcorder is no exception.

The stylish Canon HV10 gives you the ultimate in HD video and digital photo quality in the world’s smallest HDV camcorder\*.

Its 10X optical zoom lens and 2.96MP CMOS image sensor ensure meticulous detail and superior color reproduction.

And with its HD and SD recording modes, you can make the move to HD without making your SD equipment obsolete.

The HV10 is easy to use and delivers the high level of performance you’ve come to expect from Canon.

It’s the premium-quality camcorder that sophisticated and discerning videographers have been waiting for.

\*As of August 2006

# Canon



## Altec Lansing iM9

MSRP: \$199.95

[www.alteclansing.com](http://www.alteclansing.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores

and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## Extreme Sound & Rugged Portability

You can't count on every room to have concert-hall acoustics. That's why Altec Lansing's iM9 speaker system is such a good choice for the dorm room or any room.

It's compact, so it fits just about anywhere, and it is also easy to carry. It delivers high-volume, high-quality sound even in less-than-ideal surroundings. Shock-resistant elements ensure durability, and it comes with a rugged, backpack-style carry bag. You can fit, sync, and charge all dockable iPods and link iPod video and iPod photo players to a TV set, too.

### Other iM9 Features Include:

- Huge, crystal-clear sound with large speakers
- AC or battery-operated
- Charges your iPod
- MaxxBass technology
- Retractable dock
- Shock-resistant design
- Video output for iPod photo and new iPod video
- Deluxe backpack included

  
**ALTEC LANSING®**





## Altec Lansing M602

MSRP: \$199.95

[www.alteclansing.com](http://www.alteclansing.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## Fill Your Living Room With Sound

Your iPod is ideal when you're on the go. But when you're hanging around the house, wouldn't it be great to fill the room—any room—with incredible sound? Introducing the Altec Lansing M602 powered audio system.

It's the complete package: Striking good looks, plus rich, clear sound from its four custom-designed speakers. What's more, the M602 is surprisingly affordable, so you can still send the kids to college.

Just place your iPod into the M602's built-in dock and enjoy.

The unit's digital amplification delivers powerful sound from a compact system; four specially engineered full-range neodymium speakers smoothly deliver a full spectrum of pure, distinct sound. XdB™ bass-enhancement technology creates deep bass without a subwoofer.

The iPod and speaker functions (Play, Forward, Back, Volume, Bass, Treble, and Stand-By) are at your fingertips, and the built-in universal iPod dock allows data transfer and recharges your iPod.

Finally, the M602 looks great in your living room or mounted on wall, and it also enables you to play your iPod videos on most TVs (cable not included).

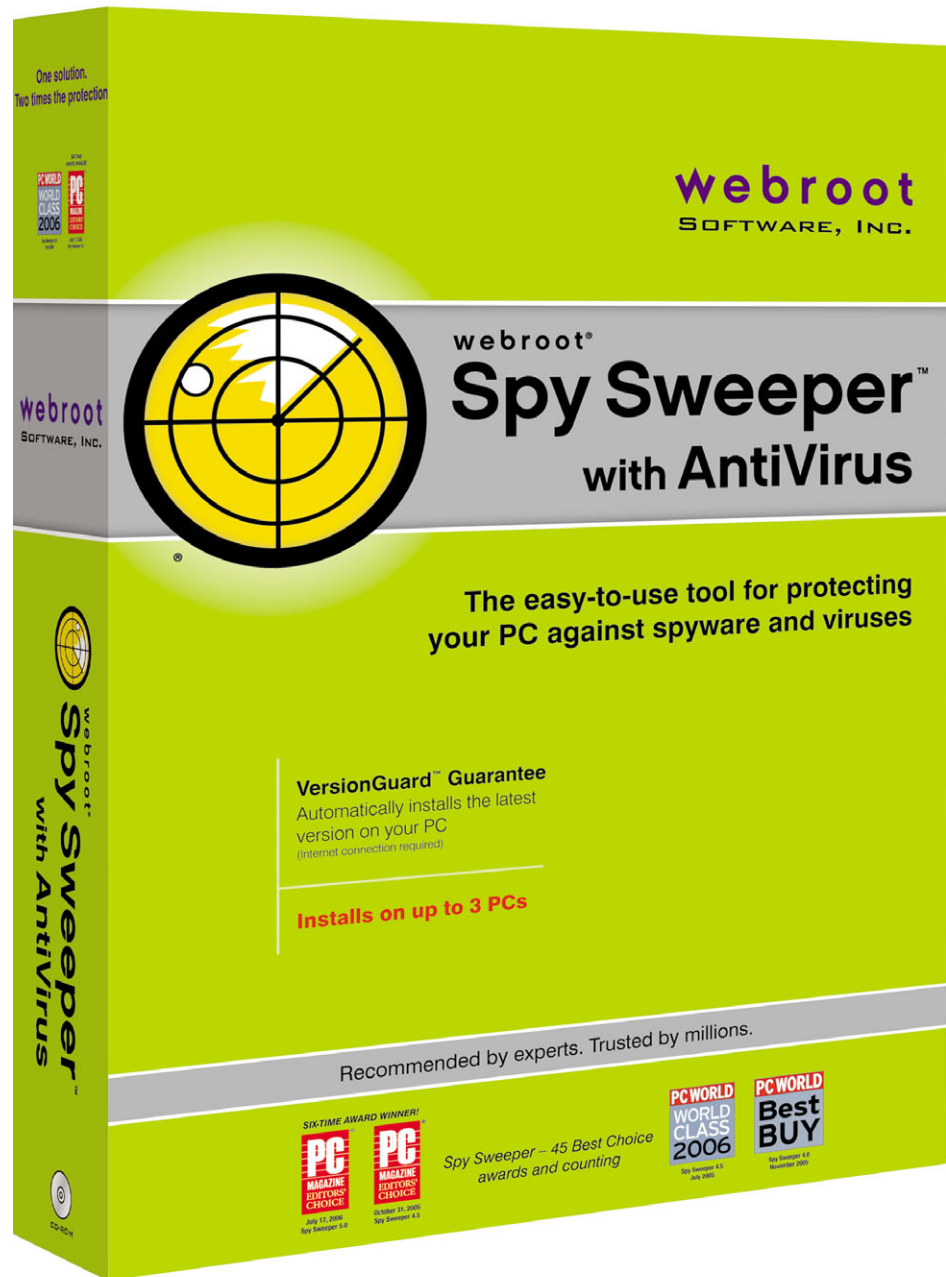
  
**ALTEC LANSING®**

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[www.webroot.com](http://www.webroot.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores  
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## Keep Your PC Spyware- & Virus-Free With One Click

Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus software features a powerful combination of award-winning anti-spyware and antivirus technologies. With just one click, Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus software quickly scans your PC and removes any harmful spyware, viruses, Trojans, worms, and rootkits. Plus its Smart Shields are always active and standing guard to keep your system safe from outside threats.

**Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus is simple to set up and customize and makes your computing life easier with:**

- Complete spyware and virus protection in one tool
- Free automatic program and definition updates for one year so your protection is always up-to-date



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- Free customer support via phone or email for one year so you can speak with an expert when you need help
- Spy Sweeper™ with AntiVirus is armed with Webroot's Comprehensive Removal Technology, which scours deeply to destroy the most stubborn and malicious spyware and viruses. It is also backed by Webroot's threat research

system, which searches the Internet 24 hours a day, seven days a week for new strains of malware.

**webroot**  
SOFTWARE, INC.



**iHome iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)**

MSRP: \$199.99

[www.ihomeaudio.com](http://www.ihomeaudio.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and

[www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



**iHome iH30  
(iPod Boom Box)**

MSRP: \$149.99

[www.ihomeaudio.com](http://www.ihomeaudio.com)



## Move & Groove To Your iPod

### iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)

iHome is ready to outfit spaces of any size with one of its most advanced offerings to date, the iH36. The unit fits snugly under a cabinet and has a host of features, including rich, powerful sound; the ability to charge and play all iPods; FM, TV, and Weather channels; timer; remote control; and a three-line display that shows song title and track number.

### iH30 (iPod Boom Box)

With its big sound that won't hurt your wallet, the iH30 is the ultimate boom box for your iPod. Featuring 4-inch speakers that emit powerful sound; a car adaptor that lets you use it on the road; and a battery option for portable use, the iH30 is perfect for the beach, the boardwalk, or the bedroom.





## iHome iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

MSRP: \$99.99

[www.ihomeaudio.com](http://www.ihomeaudio.com)

## iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

With its sleek design, protective carrying case, and host of features, the iH26 is the ultimate portable alarm clock for your iPod. Its built-in docks allow you to charge both the iPod and iPod shuffle simultaneously. Perfect for business trips, camping, picnics, or any family getaway, the iH26 brings high-quality sound and alarm features wherever you go!

**iHome™**  
the home system for your iPod®

## Mobile Edge Monaco Notebook Case

MSRP: \$99.99

[www.mobileedge.com](http://www.mobileedge.com)

Available at select Best Buy™ stores  
and [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)



## Going Mobile Like Never Before

Bring the sophistication of the new Monaco notebook case by Mobile Edge on the road with you. This European-inspired design combines the best in today's fashionable styles with its Microfiber quilted material, the buttery-soft poly-suede interior, and the organization and comfort that only a lightweight laptop case can offer. Designed by women for women, the Monaco is so stylish you will want to carry it with or without your notebook.

Beyond the elegant exterior lies all the technology you need in a notebook case. The Mobile Edge-exclusive Wireless Security Shield pocket helps block out unwanted access to your cell phone or PDA. Your new RFID passport or credit cards can be placed in this pocket to ensure your identity and

confidential information is not compromised. The dedicated padded computer-protection compartment ensures your notebook is protected, and the matching detachable cell phone pouch offers another organizational option, too.

The Monaco comes in two styles (accented with pink or white trim), both with equally impressive interiors and a detachable interior cosmetics pouch. Let the Monaco help show off your personal sense of style while looking terrific doing so.

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# ce news

COMPILED BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

## Special Edition iPod, RAZR Help Fight AIDS

Apple and Motorola have jumped on board the (PRODUCT) RED campaign, started by U2 lead singer Bono and others to fight the AIDS epidemic in Africa, by releasing special-edition products. Apple has unveiled a (PRODUCT) RED Special Edition iPod nano (\$199; [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)). Ten dollars from each sale of this 4GB, red player will go toward the Global Fund To Fight AIDS.

Additionally, Apple is selling \$25 iTunes (PRODUCT) RED gift cards and will contribute a portion of the sales from those gift cards to the Global Fund.

Motorola says it will contribute \$17 to the Global Fund from each sale of its special-edition red MOTORAZR V3m (\$79.95 after rebate with a two-year contract with U.S. Cellular, or \$64.99 after rebate with a two-year contract with Sprint; [www.motorola.com](http://www.motorola.com)). The phone features a speakerphone, MP3 player, text and video messaging capabilities, and 1.3MP digital camera.





## Magnolia Is First Retail Venue For Life|Ware Home Automation

▶ Exceptional Innovations' Life|Ware found a home in the two newest Magnolia home theater stores in California. Life|Ware, a digital entertainment and home automation system, lets users enjoy and control their digital content (including music and video) alongside their lighting, HVAC, and security systems, all through a single interface: Windows Media Center.

What sets Life|Ware apart from other such automation systems is the fact that Life|Ware users aren't limited to one brand of device; they can use a number of devices from manufacturers such as HP, Lutron, SpeakerKraft, and Panasonic (among others) together.

You can see the Life|Ware system on display at the new Magnolias' Media Room, Media Bar, Home Office, Equipment Closet, and Front Door areas.

*life|ware*™

*Digital Entertainment & Automation*™

## Affluent Shoppers Name



## Their Destination Of Choice For CE Products

▶ A recent study conducted by BIGresearch, in conjunction with online publisher Thomas, Townsend & Kent ([www.thomastownsendandkent.com](http://www.thomastownsendandkent.com)), shows that flat-panel TVs top the list of the CE products affluent shoppers want to buy during the 2006 to 2007 fall and winter months. The same survey, which encouraged respondents to choose more than one store in their answers, asked shoppers where they buy CE products, and the majority of respondents named Best Buy (53.9%), followed by Circuit City (36.6%) and Wal-Mart (34.6%). Survey participants also said they shop at "major electronic stores" (26.1%), shopping Web sites such as Amazon.com (19.8%), manufacturer's Web sites (19.2%), and Target (17.3%).

Of those who said they planned to buy a flat-panel TV this fall/winter, 77.4% named Best Buy as their shopping destination for CE products.

Notebooks, desktop PCs, cell phones, digital cameras, and home theater systems also were high on the "plan-to-buy" list of those surveyed.

## Canon Celebrates ELPH Anniversary With Benefit Auction

Canon is celebrating the 10th anniversary of its ELPH brand of cameras with a number of special events, including a

Jan. 9 auction of five bejeweled PowerShot Digital ELPH cameras in Las Vegas. Proceeds from the auction will go to the NCMEC (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children). Canon supports the work of NCMEC with a Canon4Kids program, through which the company donates imaging equipment to law-enforcement officials and educates parents on how they can use digital images in the search for missing children.

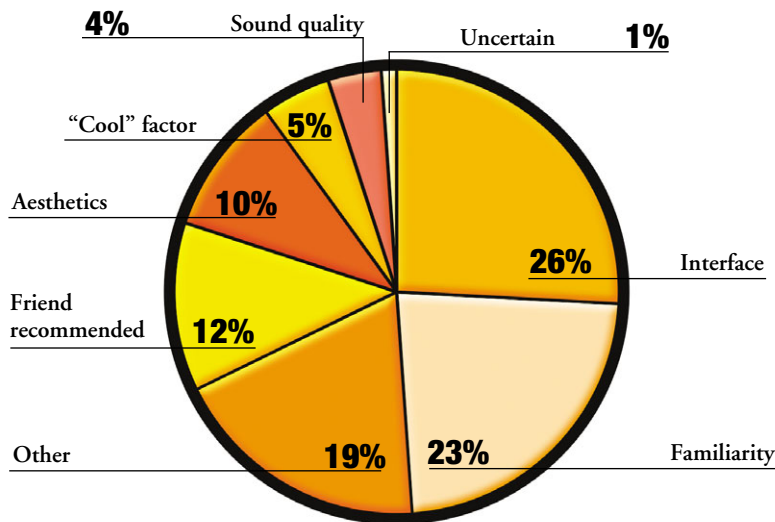


## Interface Top Reason iPod Buyers Choose Apple Players

The statistics don't lie: Apple iPods are the most popular digital music players. Of households with a digital music player, 63% have an iPod, compared to 9% each for Creative- and Sony-branded players. But what exactly makes iPods so appealing?

TDG Research's survey of 2,000 broadband households in the United States shows that the iPod's easy-to-use interface is the most-cited reason consumers give for buying an Apple player.

Primary Reason For Choosing iPod  
Over Other Music Player Brands



\*Rounded to the nearest whole percent.

## Typical Music & Video Downloader Not As Young As You Think

If you think of someone downloading music and videos frequently from the Web, do you picture someone in his teens or 20s? If so, you need to retake that picture. According to the Simultaneous Media Survey from BIGresearch, which polled more than 15,000 consumers, the average age of an entertainment downloader is 39.

Profile Of Average Entertainment Downloader

Average age	39
Average annual household income	\$54,913
Regularly/occasionally purchase products online	89%
Web site most often visited for entertainment	Yahoo.com
Web site most often visited for music/videos	iTunes.com

## tidbits

3% of U.S. **mobile phone** subscribers—8 million consumers—use their cell phones to **take videos**.

Source: Telephia

The **\$22 billion** annual toy industry is double the size of the **video games** industry in the United States.

Source: The NPD Group

80% of people who have a **camera phone** say they regularly carry their digital camera, too.

Source: In-Stat

By 2010, about 38% of all **hard drives** shipped globally will go into CE products other than computers.

Source: In-Stat

9.5 million **media center PCs** will ship in the United States by 2010, a compounded annual growth rate of 34% from 2005 to 2010.

Source: IDC



# outfit your life

## Accessories With Style

Happy New Year!

COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE



### Starck Time & Weather Station

\$225 (\$180 for MoMA members) • [www.momastore.com](http://www.momastore.com)

Count in the New Year to within one millionth of a second with this collaboration of design and hard data from Philippe Starck and Oregon Scientific. The clock, available through the MoMA online store, taps into the U.S. atomic clock and can project the time on a wall or ceiling. An outdoor wireless remote sensor transmits indoor/outdoor temperature, barometric pressure, and a 24-hour weather forecast. And if you had a bit too much champagne at midnight, no worries—there's also a snooze function.



### Pisa Laptop-Go-Lightly

\$228 • [www.levenger.com](http://www.levenger.com)

Here's a water-resistant Italian microfiber laptop bag from Levenger. The Pisa bag features a dual interior compartment, one side for your computer and files, the other side an organizational panel with a removable key fob. There's also an outside snap pocket and detachable padded leather shoulder strap. Fits most 15-inch screens.

### Grundig Hand Crank Emergency Radio

\$50 • [www.brookstone.com](http://www.brookstone.com)

Gear up for the back half of blizzard season with this crank-powered emergency radio from Grundig. You get AM, FM, and seven short-wave bands, as well as an integrated LED flashlight and a cell phone charger. The unit also comes with a rechargeable battery pack and a canvas stow case with a shoulder strap. Food rations not included.



### DigitalSpectrum MemoryFrame MF-8104 Premium

\$379.99 • [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Digital photo frames have grown up. This one operates on Windows CE 5.0 and features a 10.4-inch screen. It's wireless, and because you can set an IP address for the frame, you can connect it to your home network. The MemoryFrame can display photos from popular Internet photo sites, such as Flickr and AOL Pictures, and you can configure it to receive RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds. It even plays MP3, WMA, or streaming audio files. If a picture is worth a thousand words, how about a thousand pictures plus background music?





*Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.*

# His . . .

If there's one thing that I've learned after three Hypercolor shirts, two Vanilla Ice CDs too many, and a LIVESTRONG wristband, it's that you never know what people will latch onto as the next trend. And because of that, it's awfully difficult to force feed your brand of popular to the masses and expect them to ask for seconds.

That's why I'm a little skeptical about Sony's latest attempt to woo the in-crowd with its highly touted mylo (\$349.95; [www.sonystyle.com](http://www.sonystyle.com)). To learn about the mylo before actually using it, I visited its Web site, where a 30-something guy decked out in hipster attire assured me the mylo was "really, really cool." Now, I may not be the coolest kid in school, but I know that calling your product "really, really cool" doesn't, in fact, make it really, really cool.

Don't get me wrong. The mylo is the kind of device that makes me want to let my inner geek run wild. It functions as a digital media player and photo wallet, Web browser, and, best of all, Wi-Fi communicator.

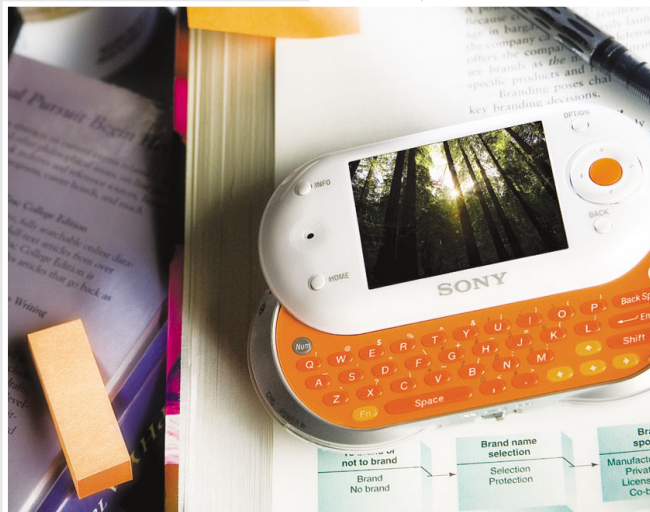
Because of its plethora of features, I gave the mylo the benefit of the doubt for its size. As a digital media player, I'd much rather have a sleeker iPod nano or video, but an iPod won't let me check my Gmail ([gmail.google.com](http://gmail.google.com)). I didn't have any problems with the audio quality and thought its performance was on par with my nano.

But even if you lump these features together, they're really a distant second to the mylo's best—and possibly worst—feature: Internet voice calling. The mylo uses Skype's ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)) service to place calls over the Internet. Calls to other Skype-enabled devices are free, and you can call regular phones using the for-fee service, SkypeOut. I was astonished by the call quality, which was nearly indistinguishable from my cell phone. (There was an ever-so-slight delay between my talking and someone hearing it on the other end, though.)

I know what you're thinking, because I initially thought the same thing. If I can really place free voice calls over the Internet, what am I doing with a cell phone? The only problem is that wireless hotspots are, at the moment, just spots. As a phone, the mylo is perfectly useless in the car, on the beach, or at your technologically backward grandma's house, and I haven't even mentioned that some hotspots charge for Internet access; paying for Internet access to make a call sounds about as desirable as having your Sidekick hacked.

There is one place the mylo could succeed—college campuses, where free Wi-Fi is plentiful. Conceptually, I love the mylo, but I need to see it stick around in the ultra-competitive tech market before I jump on board. It may turn out to be really, really cool, but I'm comfortable being really, really cautious. **FG**

BY VINCE COGLEY





# & Hers CE

I think I'm a pretty connected woman. I regularly use email, instant messaging, the Web, and my cell phone to stay in touch with family and friends. I use several devices to keep connected, but sometimes I leave my notebook at work, my cell phone battery dies, or I'm not at home to use my personal computer, among other things.

But wouldn't it be cool if there were one device that could keep me connected if I just had a Wi-Fi hotspot? That's the aim of the Sony mylo: It keeps my online connections in the palm of my hand in the form of a small (0.9 x 4.8 x 2.4 inches [HxWxD]), light (5.3 ounces) "personal communicator."

The white-and-orange mylo functions like a Sidekick or smartphone with a slide-out QWERTY keyboard. It gives you the ability to listen to music, view photos, watch short video clips, and chat with friends via instant messaging, email, or VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol). But, unlike a smartphone, with the mylo you don't have to sign up for cellular service and pay monthly service fees to talk to your friends; you just need friends who also have Skype-enabled devices. You can call these Skype friends for free.

I, regrettably, don't have many friends with Skype service, but the number is growing. With Skype, however, I could still call my friends' cell phones to test out the mylo's call quality. (Calling cell and landline phone numbers was still free at press time. If friends who don't use Skype want to call you this year, though, you'll have to pay for SkypeIn [you get your own Skype number for \$12 for three months or \$38 for 12 months]. If you want to call friends who don't have Skype, you'll have to sign up for SkypeOut [you can call anyone for 2.1 cents per minute].)

Ultimately, call quality on the mylo was great. When I called my husband's cell phone, he said I sounded clearer on the mylo than when I called him on my cell phone earlier that day. I could hear Dan best when I used the mylo's earbuds; without them it was almost impossible to hear him via the mylo's tiny speaker, even in a very quiet room.

I used Sony's mylo mostly to make calls, but having access to my email, music, and pictures; video and instant messaging; and the Internet any time I was near a Wi-Fi hotspot was liberating: I didn't have to lug around my battery-draining notebook (the mylo lets you browse the Web for up to seven hours and listen to music for up to 45 hours). I didn't have to pay service fees to make phone calls, and I could view Web pages for free (my cell phone provider charges an extra fee to surf the 'Net). Plus, I didn't have to stay locked inside my house with my computer all day just to check my email or wait for an instant message; the mylo let me roam free. **FG**

BY TRISTA KUNCE



mylo  
\$349.95  
[www.sonymyle.com](http://www.sonymyle.com)

# Fab Four

As winter's grip tightens, our desire to relax and have some fun heightens. This month's Fab Four picks are all about living it up. Among our favorites are a camera you can take on the slopes—or on a tropical getaway—without much fear it'll be ruined, and the new nano, which brightens things up with some springtime colors and packs in more entertainment per charge than ever before. And the (PRODUCT) RED version gives us the chance to warm our hearts by doing something good.

## digital camera



Olympus Stylus 730

\$399.99 • www.olympusamerica.com

digital camera

**Why:** If you don't want to worry about whether your gadgets can keep up with your rough-and-tumble life, but you also don't want to be weighed down by a bulky device, the new Olympus Stylus 730 is for you. Whether you're into mountain biking or toddler wrangling, the Stylus 730 is built to survive splashes, falls, dust, and snowstorms alike. So whatever hits you—from a toppled Big Gulp to dusty trails—your camera will likely keep on clicking. The Stylus 730's durable design doesn't sacrifice a slim form factor. The body is 2.4 x 3.8 x 0.83 inches (HxWxD), and it features a 3-inch LCD, so even in its petite package the Stylus 730 won't make you squint to see what you've framed. This 7.1MP camera packs practical features, including Digital Image Stabilization Mode, which reduces blur and increases crispness; Digital Image Stabilization Edit, which allows for in-camera retouching; and Bright Capture Technology, which helps capture great flash-free photos in low light.

**Bottom line:** All-weather? Alright.

## mp3 player



iPod nano

\$ 149 (2GB), \$ 199 (4GB), \$ 249 (8GB)  
• www.ipod.com

mp3 player

**Why:** The new iPod nano is thinner—if you can imagine—than its previous generation, comes in five colors (options determined by capacity), and boasts a longer battery life (24 hours) and a 40% brighter color display. It comes in three sizes, 2GB, 4GB, and 8GB, which can hold approximately 500, 1,000, and 2,000 songs, respectively. Color choices include silver (2GB, 4GB); green, blue, and pink (4GB); and black (8GB). If you choose the special edition (PRODUCT) RED (\$199; 4GB), Apple will donate \$10 to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS in Africa ([www.theglobalfund.org](http://www.theglobalfund.org)). (PRODUCT) RED-branded iTunes gift cards are also available at Apple's Web site. The nano's new body is made out of aluminum to offer more durability. As with all iPods, the nano only supports iTunes ([www.itunes.com](http://www.itunes.com)). You can rip your own CDs and import them using iTunes, or you can buy audio files from the iTunes store. The nano can store and display image files and play podcasts and audiobooks (from iTunes), as well.

**Bottom line:** World's most popular player.

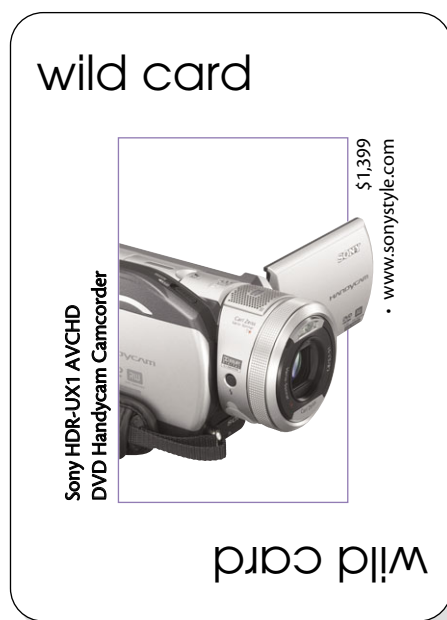


BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE



**Why:** As sleek as its popular predecessors in the RAZR line, the new MOTOKRZR K1m from Motorola is 0.7 inches thick and 1.7 inches wide. Its dark pearl-gray glass gives it an urban sophisticate look. This multimedia-focused phone features a 1.9-inch color screen, Bluetooth, an MP3 player, and a 1.3MP camera, which provides video capture and playback. The specific array of multimedia services available depends on your carrier. At press time, U.S. carriers were Alltel ([www.alltel.com](http://www.alltel.com)), Sprint ([www.sprint.com](http://www.sprint.com)), and Verizon Wireless ([www.verizonwireless.com](http://www.verizonwireless.com)). Verizon subscribers can use KRZR to download any of the 1.4 million songs available from Verizon's V CAST Music service. Alltel users can access Alltel's Axxess Broadband network, which includes broadcasts of live television. Sprint customers can subscribe to Sprint's Power Vision for more than 50 channels of live TV and on-demand video, as well as NFL Mobile, which delivers video highlights, real-time stats, and injury reports.

**Bottom line:** Elegant multimedia performer.



**Why:** If you've been looking to upgrade your camcorder, Sony's HDR-UX1 Handycam may be just the thing. It features a 10X optical zoom and a 4MP still image capture, and it lets you record directly to DVD. You can record to a DVD in SD (standard definition) in MPEG2 or HD in AVCHD (Advanced Video Codec HD). Using DVD+R Dual Layer discs, you can record one hour of HD (1080i) content. Depending on the recording format, you can play back your DVDs in most DVD players, computers, Blu-ray Disc players, and Sony PlayStation 3 video game consoles. It supports Sony's MemoryStick Duo, so you can transfer still images to your PC for printing or emailing. The high-quality Carl Zeiss lenses are treated with layers of special coating designed to increase contrast and color saturation and decrease glare and flare. The built-in microphone records in 5.1-channel Dolby Digital surround-sound, and the Super NightShot Infrared System lets you shoot video in low light. The HDR-UX1 isn't Mac-compatible.

**Bottom line:** Worth splurging on.

### The Camera: Olympus Stylus 730

\$399.99

[www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com)

### The MP3 Player: iPod nano

\$149 (2GB),  
\$199 (4GB),  
\$249 (8GB)

[www.ipod.com](http://www.ipod.com)

### The Phone: Motorola MOTOKRZR K1m

\$349.99

[www.motorola.com/us](http://www.motorola.com/us)

### The Wild Card: Sony HDR-UX1 AVCHD DVD Handycam Camcorder

\$1,399

[www.sonymstyle.com](http://www.sonymstyle.com)



# Synergy Series

**Without a doubt**, Klipsch Synergy Series speakers create unique, ultradynamic musical and cinematic experiences that capture all of the emotion of your favorite artists and filmmakers.

Klipsch's ongoing experience in the cinema industry is a significant benefit to its customers because the cutting-edge research that drives its professional theater speakers is also applied to its home theater products.

All Synergy speakers feature genuine, professional-style horn technology, which delivers smooth, natural performance with

unmatched clarity and detail. Plus, these speakers are highly efficient, meaning they can fill any size room with powerful, concert hall quality sound but without the distortion of conventional speakers.

Available in an assortment of sleek floorstanding, bookshelf, flat-panel and micro systems, the Synergy Series offers superior performance and seamless integration in a variety of styles and price points. Regardless of what system you choose, the same high-end materials and tried-and-true technology are used in every single Synergy product.

Each Synergy speaker also undergoes rigorous quality tests before it ever leaves the factory. This attention to detail guarantees the years of reliable performance that's expected from Klipsch.

More than just a name, the Synergy Series represents high-value, high-performance sound solutions. And it only makes sense; Klipsch has been in the business of producing no-compromise, premium-quality speakers for over 60 years.

## Every Great Artist has a Signature Sound

For Klipsch, it's the horn. Realizing that the qualities that make the horn nature's ideal sound-gathering shape also make it perfect for accurate and dynamic sound transmission, Paul W. Klipsch created the first Klipschorn® in 1946. Since then, Klipsch's proprietary horn technology has been the driving force behind the company's highly acclaimed and stunningly precise sound. To this day, every speaker Klipsch makes—from the smallest satellites to Professional Cinema speakers—is horn loaded to create remarkably accurate, efficient and compromise-free acoustics. Long live great sound.





# A/V Club Shopping Tips

## Buying A Bedroom LCD TV

BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG

**L**isa Simpson had a point when she protested, "It's not our fault our generation has short attention spans, Dad. We watch an appalling amount of TV." Still, many of us favor Homer Simpson's heartfelt rebuke, "Don't you ever, *ever* talk that way about television." We Americans love our TVs. Nielsen Media Research reports that there are more TVs in the average U.S. home (2.73) than people (2.55), and more than half of the U.S. homes have more than three sets. Besides the living room, the bedroom is probably the next most popular watching area. The following are tips for buying a flat-panel LCD or plasma TV for a bedroom that you can use while you shop.

Most experts suggest buying as big of a screen as you can afford, but one that doesn't overwhelm the room. TV stands offer an alternative to wall-mounting, and they're available in many varieties, so finding an exact or close match to your existing furniture is usually possible. Browsing online furniture stores will give you an idea of colors, woods, form factors, and more. We found everything from the simple, yet elegant, Tech Craft Sorrento BEL501B (\$295; [www.techcraft.net](http://www.techcraft.net)) to a 670-pound Anthony Lauren Craftsman Series Cherry Oak Entertainment Center (\$4,295; available at [FurnitureOnline.com](http://FurnitureOnline.com)).

Consider a specific theme for the TV. For example, Hannspree ([www.hannspree.com](http://www.hannspree.com)) carries Sports, Fantasy, and Style series with such models as the 10-inch Hannswood (\$299) with "country wood finish," 10-inch Hannsbaseball (\$199.99; the New York Yankees model is our choice), and 10-inch Hannshelicopter (\$399.99), complete with chopper blades for a child's room.

Although preference for TV placement is subjective (we're smack-dab-in-front watchers), general advice is to position the TV close to eye level and about twice the distance from you as the TV's diagonal screen size. Thus, you'd place a 30-inch set about 5 to 7 feet away. If space (and budget) allows, some innovative watchers place the TV at the foot of the bed in a custom cabinet, using a built-in motor to raise and lower the set.

If wall mounting the TV, avoid walls that pick up excessive glare from windows, overhead lights, and lamps. Consult the TV's manufacturer and manual for precise mounting instructions and specific mounting brackets to use. If in doubt, use brackets that meet VESA (Video Electronics Standards Association) requirements. Additionally, brackets that swivel instead of having a fixed position are good for bedrooms. To hide the TV's cables, plus those from a DVD player, DVR, or home-theater system, paintable/stainable raceways work well. You can also avoid adding more clutter by buying a model with a built-in DVD player or DVR, such as LG's new 42LB1DRA (\$2,599; [www.lge.com](http://www.lge.com)), a 42-inch LCD with integrated HDTV and built-in HD DVR.

### SHOPPING CHECKLIST

#### ☐ What technology do you prefer?

- ☐ LCD flat panel
- ☐ Plasma flat panel

#### ☐ What size of screen do you want?

- ☐ Less than 35 inches
- ☐ Greater than 35 inches

#### ☐ Where will you place the TV?

- ☐ Wall
- ☐ Stand
- ☐ In a cabinet
- ☐ In a home-entertainment center

#### ☐ What accessories do you need?

- ☐ Wall mounting brackets (VESA approved)
- ☐ Raceway to hide cables
- ☐ Paint or wood stain

#### ☐ Notes

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# Top **5** Things To Know Before You Buy An HDTV

**H**DTV is currently the star quarterback of the consumer electronics world, stealing all the attention and attracting new fans every day. But as the wow factor wears off and you start window shopping, you'll quickly realize that choosing an HDTV that fits your lifestyle can be difficult. Here's a brief overview of the top five things to keep in mind when trying to score the perfect HDTV.

**1 Size.** Determine your optimal viewing distance to calculate how big your HDTV should be. Contrary to conventional wisdom, bigger is *not* better. A 60-inch plasma HDTV may look stunning in Best Buy's show room, but it can look pretty unappealing when viewed from a distance of six feet or less. At such close range, you may even experience eye strain and severe picture pixilation. For every foot of diagonal screen, sit no less than 1.5 feet and no more than three feet away from a TV. So, for example, for a 42-inch HDTV, you'll get the best viewing experience when sitting no less 5.25 feet and no more than 10.5 feet away from the TV.

**2 Type.** Choose the HDTV type that best fits you, your lifestyle, and your budget. Flat-panel TVs, such as LCDs and plasmas, are ultra-thin,

but they can also be expensive. RPTVs (rear-projection TVs) offer bigger screens for less money. For instance, you can often purchase a 51-inch CRT-based RPTV for less than \$1,000, while a comparably sized plasma TV can cost three times as much or more.

**3 Aspect ratio.** HDTV screens generally come in two aspect ratios; widescreen and fullscreen. Widescreen TVs with 16:9 screens are much wider than they are tall. Fullscreen TVs with 4:3 screens are only slightly wider than they are tall. Both TV types can display either aspect ratio, but widescreen TVs will show black bars at the left and right sides of the screen when displaying fullscreen content, and fullscreen TVs will show black bars at the top and bottom of the screen when displaying widescreen content.

**4 Features.** Make sure your new HDTV has the features you want. If you plan to watch digital over-the-air broadcasts now or in the future, purchase an HDTV that has an integrated tuner (also known as an HDTV, digital, or ATSC tuner). According to an FCC mandate, HDTVs smaller than 25 inches aren't required to have built-in tuners until March (larger HDTVs manufactured after March 2006 include tuners). Other features you may consider include built-in DVD players, DVRs, speakers, and networking capabilities.

**5 Extras.** Don't forget the accessories. Make sure to set aside some of your HDTV budget for the essentials that aren't included with the TV, such as cables, components, mounting hardware, a universal remote, and furniture. For instance, HDMI cables can cost between \$50 and \$100. Mounting hardware for flat-panel HDTVs can set you back upwards of \$500 or more. Plan on devoting a good chunk of your budget—up to 40% in some cases—to these accessories. **PG**

BY ANDREW LEIBMAN

# Lessons In HDTV

## The Future Of Broadcasting



**Y**ou may have heard about the FCC's upcoming mandatory transition to digital broadcasting and wondered what regulatory changes are on the horizon and what they mean for you.

Congress has mandated that federally licensed TV broadcasters convert to digital (rather than analog) signals. The switch, according to FCC documents, should "free up parts of the broadcast spectrum for public safety and other valuable uses." This frequency consolidation is possible due to digital signals' increased efficiency—digital signals carry more information over less frequency bandwidth. Portions of the newly clear spectrum will provide more bandwidth for police, fire, and rescue services. And those "other valuable uses"? The government plans to

auction off monopoly rights to significant chunks of the spectrum to wireless and other commercial entities.

FCC rules mandate a transition to digital television broadcasting but not necessarily to high-definition broadcasting. DTV (digital television) isn't the same as HDTV, though HDTV is one type (and the most common type) of DTV; digital broadcasts can carry SD (standard definition) and ED (enhanced definition) signals, as well. (For more information about HDTV, see "News Laws, New Signals" on page 34.)

In order to achieve the changeover, lawmakers set several deadlines. As of March 1, 2007, all televisions of any size must include a digital tuner. And last year, after several "firm" deadlines came and went, Congress set a final broadcast switchover deadline of Feb. 17, 2009.

After that date, TV stations may no longer broadcast analog signals. Thus, all broadcast viewers (those who receive signals over-the-air via antenna) will need either an HDTV tuner or a digital-to-analog converter box that translates digital signals into analog format. Today, most stations already broadcast digital (and often high-definition) channels in addition to their existing analog offerings, and at least some digital programming is available in every media market.

Does the switchover guarantee that all your favorite shows will be available in HD? Not necessarily—remember that the FCC rules affect only over-the-air broadcasts. If you get your television exclusively from a cable or satellite subscription, the new rules technically don't apply to your providers. However, the transition's affects will reach beyond the strictly OTA broadcast world. As local networks convert all of their equipment and capacities to HD, they won't want to maintain old analog capabilities just to keep cable and satellite companies from having to come along. Don't underestimate the power of shifting consumer expectations, either. As we all come to expect more and more HDTV in our lives, most channels that want to remain competitive will have to follow suit. If nothing else, the mandated switchover means that by February 2009, you're virtually guaranteed to have access to plenty of high-quality, high-definition, completely free programming. Now that's something worth supporting. **FG**

BY GREGORY ANDERSON



# HDTV Glossary

So you want a new HDTV but making sense of the acronyms, protocols, standards, and other industry-related lingo has you feeling intimidated, exasperated, and defeated. Take solace. Rip out the following glossary of HDTV-related terms and use it as you shop to decode what might otherwise leave you blurry-eyed.

BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG

**aspect ratio**—Describes a TV screen's width-to-height measurements. Standard TVs have a 4:3 aspect ratio, or 4 inches of width for every 3 inches of height. HDTV sets have a widescreen, or 16:9, aspect ratio, meaning 16 inches of width for every 9 inches of height. Most HDTV programs are produced for widescreen.

**DLP (digital light processing)**—An image-projection technology based on Texas Instruments' DMD (Digital Micromirror Device) chip, which includes millions of integrated tiny mirrors—each representing an individual pixel—that reflect filtered light through a lens system onto a larger screen. DLPs provide good wide-angle viewing and perform well in dark settings due to their superior handling of black levels.

**flat-panel TV**—A thin, lightweight TV especially suitable for wall mounting. Flat-panel HDTVs are typically based on plasma or LCD technologies.

**HDTV (high-definition TV)**—A nearly 10-year-old TV broadcasting format that transmits multichannel audio and digital TV signals (usually in the MPEG-2 file format) vs. the analog signals that conventional TVs use. HDTV can also refer to a TV that receives high-definition signals. Compared to a standard TV, an HDTV can display about 10 times as many pixels for a much better overall resolution and detail. Current HDTV broadcast formats are 720p and

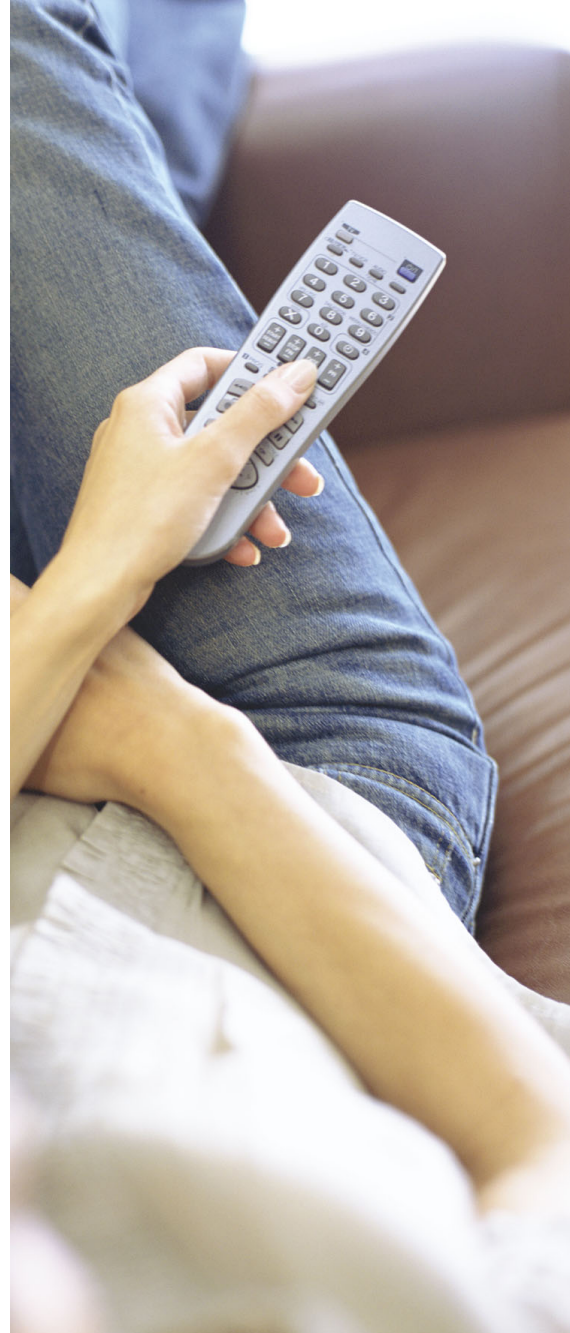
1080i, meaning HDTV transmissions at a minimum 1,280- x 720-pixel resolution or maximum 1,920 x 1,080 resolution. For the latter this means a display of 1,920 columns of pixels wide by 1,080 horizontal lines of pixels. HDTVs that can handle a 1080p resolution are now appearing (although broadcasts aren't currently available at that resolution), as well as Blu-ray and HD DVD players and discs. Additionally, Sony's upcoming PlayStation 3 will support 1080p output.

**HDTV-ready**—A TV that can display an HD image but needs a separate set-top box (or tuner) to receive and process HDTV signals to display them.

**interlaced vs. progressive scan**—Refers to how an image is drawn. Typically, interlaced is less desirable, as every other line of an image is drawn every 1/60 of a second, producing less overall detail and more flicker. A progressive scan redraws every line of a picture every 1/60 of a second for more detail and less flicker.

**HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface)**—A high-quality, expensive interface that transfers uncompressed, all-digital video and multichannel audio in one cable. One HDMI cable can connect an HDTV-ready set to a set-top box. HDMI cables also connect HDTVs to DVD players and other digital sources.

**LCD (liquid-crystal display)**—Along with plasma screens, one of the two



most common HDTV screen types. LCDs use liquid crystals, electricity, and backlighting to form images. Flat-panel LCDs typically use less power, are lighter and thinner, are available in more screen sizes, and have higher resolutions than comparably sized flat-panel plasmas.

**microdisplay**—A subcategory of RPTV (rear-projection TV) technology that includes LCD and DLP variants.

**plasma**—Plasma HDTVs use fluorescent light technology and plasma gas to form images. Plasmas are less expensive, often have wider viewing angles, and offer better contrast than similarly sized LCDs but are geared toward large-screen viewing.





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# Are You Ready For Some Football?

## Best Game-Day TVs

HP PL5060N • \$2,999.99 • [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)

BY GREG ANDERSON

**W**inter is here, and for many of us, that means the BCS Bowl Championship and the Super Bowl. Give your gameday party a tremendous boost with a dazzling new TV. We'll recommend some of our favorite models for this season along with a few key considerations for finding the perfect set to take you through years of playoffs and bowl games.

First, football parties need a big screen. Don't settle for less than 34 inches—50 or 60 is best. Viewing angle matters, as well. Unless you and your 10 closest friends are going to cuddle up across from the screen, aim for as close to 180 degrees as possible. Plasmas deliver a roughly 178-degree viewing, and traditional CRTs have wide viewing angles, as well. LCDs sometimes have more limited viewing angles, although we found a few exceptions we won't hesitate to recommend. Rear-projection sets give you more screen size for less money but have more limited viewing angles (horizontally and vertically).

In addition to screen size, we also believe that having a TV that supports high-definition resolution is crucial. Not all games are available in HD, yet, but you won't want to miss the ones that are.

Finally, make sure you get PiP (picture-in-picture) or one of its variations, which lets you view a couple of games at once. There's nothing worse than missing the Packers score on the Vikings because your friend just *had* to check the Steelers' score on another channel. **FC**

## Plasma Models

HD plasma TVs are the best football viewing technology since bleachers came along. They provide high contrast and render fast action with in-your-face clarity.



## HP PL5060N

● ● ● ● ● ● \$2,999.99 • [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)

This 50-inch set delivers 1080i resolution and vibrant colors and has a built-in HD tuner for picking up games from local over-the-air stations. The side speakers are detachable, saving space for those with surround systems.



## Panasonic TH-42PX600U

● ● ● ● \$2,999.95 • [www.panasonic.com](http://www.panasonic.com)

Panasonic's plasmas are known for their incredible pictures. This model adds picture-in-picture, a variety of inputs, and a sleek design for a total package.



## Pioneer PDP-4360HD

\$3,999.99 • [www.pioneerelectronics.com](http://www.pioneerelectronics.com)

This 43-inch model produces excellent color and delivers sharp pictures. Ample inputs let you hook up an over-the-air antenna for local games, a cable box for regional broadcasts, *and* a high-definition DVD player (such as a BD [Blu-ray Disc] or HD DVD) for last season's highlight discs

## LCD TVs

LCDs have moved from the computer desk to the TV stand, due to their sharp pictures, dazzling color, and reasonable prices. They're not generally as large as plasmas, though these models don't skimp on size.

# Samsung LN-S4095D

\$3,299.99 • [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)

This 40-inch LCD's super-fast response time can handle even the most frenzied blitz or fastest punt return. Hidden speakers keep the set looking sleek, and dynamic contrast keeps the picture sharp on both Saturday afternoons and Monday nights.



# Dell W3706MC

\$1,799 • [www.dell.com](http://www.dell.com)

The largest of Dell's LCDs, the W3706MC has several PiP options, a 178-degree viewing angle, and detachable speakers. It can also act as a computer monitor, letting you track in-progress games' stats on-screen.



## Rear Projection & CRTs

You need some money left over for grilled chicken and cold beverages. These sets don't have the sexy visual appeal of flat panels, but, if you have a large family room, they provide the biggest screens for your money.



## Samsung HL-S5688W

\$3,299.99 • [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)

DLP technology enables big screens and compromises on size between the unwieldy bulk of CRTs and the expensive thinness of flat panels. DLPs also provide great value for their screen sizes. This model's top-of-the-line resolution and spectacular color may overcome its viewing-angle limitations (140 degrees horizontal, 60 degrees vertical) if you're watching with just a couple friends or neighbors. Be certain to look at DLP models before you buy, though. A small number of people see rainbow-like effects, and, if you're one of the unfortunate few, this technology isn't for you.



# Sony KD-34XBR970

\$1,199.99 • [www.sonystyle.com](http://www.sonystyle.com)

Sony's new FD Trinitron CRT models come with full HD resolution and widescreen aspect ratios. This 34-inch model is as big as direct-view CRTs get; the set isn't what you'd call svelte, but the incredible picture and reasonable price may be worth the trade-offs.





# New Laws, New Signals

## Digital TV & What It Means For You

M

any of us associate the word “digital” with high quality. Digital phones provide clearer calls, digital video cameras yield sharper images, and so on. The same generalization applies to TV; a digital TV signal yields a better-quality picture than an analog signal.

### A Change Is Coming

In February 2006, President Bush signed legislation that requires all TV signals to be digital by Feb. 17, 2009. This means that broadcasters must cease broadcasting OTA (over-the-air) analog television signals and move to all-digital broadcasts.



## Fast Facts: Making The Switch

**B**roadcasters must stop broadcasting OTA analog TV signals and move to all-digital broadcasts by Feb. 17, 2009.

The changeover from analog to digital mainly affects users who view OTA programming on older TVs with NTSC tuners.

Older TVs with NTSC tuners must have a converter box to display OTA digital programming.

TVs with ATSC tuners don't require a converter box.

Starting March 1, 2007, all TVs and non-TVs with tuners (such as VCRs and DVD recorders) must have a built-in ATSC tuner. ●

(National Television Standards Committee) tuners. If you bought your TV after 1998 and it has a digital tuner, or if you subscribe to cable or satellite, the changeover shouldn't affect you. Most cable providers pick up the local broadcasts, convert the signals, and transmit them to your home via cable. An increasing number of satellite providers are beginning to do the same, thereby eliminating any problems with OTA transmission for satellite subscribers.

TVs with ATSC (Advanced Television Systems Committee) tuners, or digital TV tuners, support digital signals and thus will not require a converter box. Currently, all TVs 25 inches and larger are required to have ATSC tuners built in. Starting March 1, 2007, all TVs (regardless of size) and non-TVs with tuners (such as VCRs and DVD recorders) will be required by the FCC to have a built-in ATSC tuner. Monitors, including some plasmas and LCDs, are exempt from these rules if they lack a built-in tuner.

If you bought your TV before 1998, it will likely require a converter box to receive and display digital TV signals. If you bought your TV in 1998 or later, and it was marketed as "HD Built In" or having an "integrated HDTV tuner" or an "ATSC tuner," the TV won't require a converter box. Any TV sold as "HD-Ready" or "HDTV Monitor" support HDTV-resolution video but do not have a built-in ATSC tuner. As a result, these sets require an HD (high-definition) source such as an ATSC OTA, cable, or satellite receiver that can decode the digital signal.

Most VCRs and DVRs do not have integrated ATSC broadcast tuners, even if they can record in digital formats. However, if your VCR or DVR has a slot for a CableCARD, it probably also has an ATSC tuner. Some DVRs from satellite broadcast companies, such as the DIRECTV HD DVR (\$999 with an annual programming commitment; [www.directv.com](http://www.directv.com)), have an ATSC tuner; most DVRs from cable companies lack a digital tuner.

## Your TV & HDTV

High-definition TVs are capable of displaying greater-quality pictures than standard-definition TVs; to take full advantage of an HD broadcast signal, you'll need an HDTV. If you already subscribe to cable or satellite, you can benefit from an upgrade to digital and to high-definition TV. HDTV displays images that are more than twice as detailed as images on analog TVs and delivers multichannel surround sound. Additionally, HDTVs are backward compatible with analog signals, meaning they can display standard and HDTV images.

Standard-definition TVs display a resolution of 640 x 480 pixels. In contrast, HDTVs top out at 1,920 x 1,080 pixels. If you look at an analog TV next to an HDTV, you'll see the difference these extra pixels make.

The change from analog to digital will free 84MHz of wave space for other uses, such as mobile wireless data and emergency response agencies. The FCC (Federal Communications Commission) will auction the old analog TV bandwidth in January 2008. Up to \$1.5 billion of the proceeds from this auction will go to provide two \$40 vouchers per household to use toward the purchase of converter boxes for users who may not otherwise be able to afford them.

## Your TV & Digital Signals

It is also important to note that the changeover from analog to digital will only affect users who view OTA programming on older TVs with NTSC

## If you're shopping for a new HDTV, look for one with a built-in ATSC tuner.

At best, the sound that comes from our standard-definition TVs is 4-channel Dolby surround sound, but most of the time, standard-definition TVs put out 2-channel stereo sound. HD broadcasts support 5.1-channel Dolby Digital surround sound, which is similar to the sound you'd hear in a movie theater. In order to take full advantage of HD sound, even with an HDTV, you'll need a home-theater audio system.

### Get HDTV

If you already own an HDTV, you'll need access to a digital signal (via cable, satellite, or OTA broadcast) and an HDTV tuner (if your TV doesn't already have one) before you can enjoy the full HDTV experience. TVs marketed as "HDTV ready" require a separate HD receiver that can decode digital and HD signals in order to display HDTV images.

To receive OTA digital signals, visit AntennaWeb.org for help finding the best HD antenna for your location. This site also has compass headings for the nearest HDTV transmission towers to help align your antenna properly. While adjusting the antenna, refer to the signal strength meters found on your HD receiver or television. If there's a hill or obstruction between your home and the broadcast tower, OTA reception may not be possible.

### Fast Facts: Digital & HDTV

**H**D broadcasts support 5.1-channel Dolby Digital surround sound.

You'll need an HDTV, digital signal (via cable, satellite, or OTA broadcast), and an HDTV tuner or set-top box to get the full benefit of HDTV broadcasts.

The info at AntennaWeb.org can help you select and set up an OTA HD antenna.

Cable subscribers will need digital cable in order to receive high-definition broadcasts.

HD broadcasts from either cable or satellite providers typically don't require an HDTV tuner built into the TV. Instead, you'll need a set-top box from your service provider. ●

Many customers are confused as to whether they need a built-in HDTV tuner. If you're going to get your HD broadcasts from a cable or satellite provider, most likely you don't need an HDTV tuner in the TV. Instead, you can rent or buy a receiver from your service provider in order to decode digital and HD signals.

If you're shopping for a new HDTV, look for one with a built-in ATSC tuner. By having the tuner built in, you can receive HD signals without the need for a separate box that takes up space in your entertainment center.

If you have an HDTV that is DCR (digital cable-ready), such as the Samsung LN-S4096D (\$4,099; [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)), you can tune in to HDTV channels without an external set-top box.

DCR TVs use a CableCARD—a special access card from your cable provider that unscrambles digital signals. With a DCR TV and a CableCARD, you should receive a slightly better-quality picture than you would from a set-top box because the CableCARD in the HDTV directly decodes the signal. The downside to a DCR TV is that it doesn't support video-on-demand and some electronic program guides. Additionally, one-way CableCARDs won't let the TV tune into more than one channel at a time. For these reasons, many users prefer a set-top DVR that can tune or record two channels at once. An improved, two-way version of DCR, called Interactive Digital Cable Ready, is under development.

### Move To Digital

As the Feb. 17, 2009, deadline for digital broadcasts rapidly approaches, you'll see more TVs that can decode digital signals. With a TV that can handle digital signals, you'll be able to experience all of the benefits HDTV has to offer, including better picture and sound quality. **FE**

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

### shelf watch

Sony VAIO G1  
From \$1,899 • [www.dynamism.com](http://www.dynamism.com)

If you have to catch up on a bit of work as you watch your new HDTV, give the lightweight (1.97 pounds) Sony VAIO G1 a go. You'll barely notice it on your lap as you take advantage of its integrated Bluetooth or Wi-Fi connections and view documents on its 12.1-inch XGA TFT screen. Sony didn't skimp on power, space, or memory, as the G1 sports an Intel Core Solo U1400 1.20GHz processor, 1.5GB of RAM, and an 80GB hard drive.





# Know How

## Install Your Own Wall Mount



**F**lat-panel TVs may look picture-frame thin, but you can't just pound a nail into the wall to hang it up. Hire professional help if you're wary of installing the wall mount yourself. Most consumer electronics retailers, such as Best Buy, offer installation services. If you're willing to try it yourself, however, this article will help you properly mount your TV.

When shopping, make sure to get a VESA (Video Electronics Standards Association)-compliant mount. Most flat-panel displays adhere to VESA's FDMI (Flat Display Mounting Interface) standard. Also, make sure to consult your TV's user manual or the manufacturer's Web site to find a compatible wall mount. This will ensure you'll invest in one that is the right size and will support your TV's weight.

Here are some things to consider before you begin. You'll need at least two people to complete the installation, and you'll also need tools such as a drill and screwdriver. Set aside at least an hour to complete the installation. Check the wall mount to make sure all parts are included and the instructions

are clear and easy-to-understand. Also, check the manual that came with your flat-panel TV for any additional wall-mounting instructions.

When choosing your wall mount location, opt for a large wall with no windows, doors, vents, or any other source of direct sunlight or temperature fluctuations nearby. Also, make sure there are no appliances or machinery close by that could cause the wall to vibrate. Make sure the wall can support up to five times the weight of your HDTV—anything less and you'll have to reinforce that area.

Try to position the wall mount and TV so that it will be at eye-level when you're watching it. If applicable, make

sure to leave room on either side of the TV for installing speakers. Before drilling your first hole, consider the big picture, and imagine where the components and wires will go when the TV is mounted. If you're using an articulating wall mount (one that can swivel up and down and side to side), make sure you can freely move the mounted TV vertically and horizontally.

Once you have the ideal location, use a stud finder to locate the wall's stud. Mark the position of the holes on the wall in pencil and then use the appropriately sized drill bit to drill the holes. Install the portion of the wall mount that attaches to the wall; install the portion that attaches to the TV; and finally connect the two together with the help of at least one other person. With a little elbow grease and some careful planning, your gorgeous new HDTV will be mounted in no time. **PG**

BY ANDREW LEIBMAN

# Buy A Home-Theater System

Get Movie-Quality  
Sound At Home



JVC TH-C50 • \$449.95 • [www.jvc.com](http://www.jvc.com)

A

home-theater system isn't complete without movie-quality sound. Unfortunately, that sound will not come from your

HDTV's built-in speakers. For crystal-clear sound comparable to what you'd hear in a movie theater, you'll need an audio system with surround-sound.

With a quality sound system, you'll hear the difference as thunder rumbles through the room or birds sing sweetly in the trees while watching your favorite movie. You'll also hear the difference in high-definition TV broadcasts that incorporate Dolby Digital 5.1 audio. Let's take a closer look at some of the important factors to consider when buying a home-theater system.

## Basic Components

A complete surround-sound system includes a receiver, center speaker, left and right speakers, at least two rear satellite speakers, and a subwoofer. The receiver acts as a hub for all audio input from the components of your system—TV, DVD player, digital video recorder, VCR, etc.—and decodes common audio formats, including Dolby Digital and DTS, before sending the audio signals to your speakers.

If you're unable to afford a complete system right now, you can start with a receiver, center, left, and right speakers

and add the rest later. Alternatively, you may choose an HTB (Home Theater in a Box), a complete package of audio and video equipment that typically includes speakers, a subwoofer, and a receiver with a built-in DVD player. If you already have a DVD player, look for an HTB that doesn't incorporate a built-in DVD player. In doing so, you should be able to save some money or get a few additional audio features for the same price. Because HTBs are a complete set, you usually can't upgrade the system later by adding additional speakers.

Many HTBs, such as the JVC TH-C50 (\$449.95; [www.jvc.com](http://www.jvc.com)), come with most of the necessary cables to connect the speakers and receiver. To connect the rest of your components to the receiver, you'll need to buy the cables separately. Some of the common connection types found on receivers and components include RCA composite audio (mono/stereo only), digital coaxial, fiber optic, RCA composite video, S-Video, component video, DVI (Digital Visual Interface), IEEE 1394, and HDMI. These cables range in price depending on the type and length of the cord. Whenever possible, try to use HDMI cables, such as the Monster 400 HDMI400-1M (\$99.95; [www.monstercable.com](http://www.monstercable.com)), to achieve

the best video and sound quality possible.

### At The Electronics Store

Consider the size of your room when buying a home-theater receiver. In general, you'll want at least 50 watts per channel for a small room and 70 to 100 watts per channel for large rooms. Power influences the maximum volume of your system, but it doesn't affect the clarity of your system.

For clarity, check a receiver's THD (Total Harmonic Distortion) and frequency response. When comparing receivers, lower THD ratings mean clearer sound. A range describes frequency response. Look for a minimum frequency response of 30Hz, with an upper end of at least 20kHz.

When shopping for a home-theater setup, one of the most important things to do is test the speakers before buying them. Bring a few of your favorite movies and audio CDs to the store so you have a familiar reference to use in judging the speakers' sound. Listen for speakers that are "voice-matched," meaning that all of

## shelf watch

Turtle Beach ANR-20  
\$99.95 • [www.turtle-beach.com](http://www.turtle-beach.com)

These noise-reduction headphones, with a traditional over-the-ear design, have padded ear cups for a more comfortable fit, and the batteries are housed in the headphones, so you don't have to cart around a separate battery pack. After a particularly demanding day, unplug the headphones from your MP3 player, plug them into your home theater system, and relax without disturbing everyone else in the house.



the speakers offer similar frequency response, sensitivity, and tonal character. The best way to achieve voice matching is to select a series of speakers designed to work in concert, typically from the same product line and manufacturer.

By combining a home-theater system with your HDTV, you'll experience the full picture and sound quality of HDTV broadcasts. Many types of systems are available to suit your budget, style preferences, and room size. While shopping, listen carefully before choosing a home-theater system. **FC**

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

## Accessories

To maximize the performance from your audio and video equipment, use high-quality connections between the components. This ensures that you'll see and hear all of the performance you paid for.

Also, make sure to get enough speaker wire to reach from the receiver to each speaker, keeping in mind that you may want

to string the wire under a rug, along the baseboard, or around doors and windows to keep it out of the way. It's always a good idea to allow for an extra foot or two of cabling for each speaker, in case you need it.

If wired speakers aren't your thing, look for wireless speaker adapters or wireless speaker kits. The Panasonic Wireless Rear Speaker Kit

(\$149.95; [www.panasonic.com](http://www.panasonic.com)) eliminates the clutter of cables and is compatible with select Panasonic home-theater systems.

You may want to consider a set of headphones to accommodate your spouse who's reading next to you. Headphones also work well for apartment life when you're watching TV late at night.

There are some speakers you can mount on the wall, and others for which you'll have to find stands. To avoid extra holes in the wall, look for speaker stands that match your room's décor. For greater flexibility, look for adjustable-height stands, such as the Sanus Adjustable-Height Speaker Stands (\$59.99; [www.sanus.com](http://www.sanus.com)). ●



## tips

### Tweak Your Home Theater's Speakers

# 1

#### Position Pointers

Correct speaker positioning will help create the intended "soundstage" encoded into a DVD or surround-sound broadcast. If you're setting up a 5.1 system (a popular configuration), you can't do better than the recommendations of Dolby Laboratories, one of the leading pioneers in acoustic technology, for the five full-range speakers involved: Place the left/right fronts several feet apart on either side of the TV and angle them toward your listening position. Their tweeters (the smaller loudspeaker component in the cabinet) should be at ear level while you're sitting. As for the center speaker, you may have to compromise here because it's located above or below the TV. The left/right surround speakers should go to either side of your position, about a foot higher than the front counterparts.

# 3

#### Read The Menu

Home-theater receivers have a setup menu for optimizing your speakers' performance. Don't ignore it—crack open your users manual and locate that menu. You'll probably set three variables for each individual speaker: (A) Size. The typical choices are Small, Large, or None. If the speaker's woofer is 5 inches or smaller, set it as Small; (B) Distance. Measure and input the distance from each speaker to your listening position. This will ensure that sounds reach you precisely when they're supposed to; and (C) Level. The receiver will play a test tone in one speaker at a time, so you can adjust each one's individual volume until their relative levels sound the same.

# 5

#### Don't Mix & Match Brands

Brands of speakers tend to have their own characteristic sound due to variations in frequency response, materials used in the cabinets, and so on. If you're buying a complete set of matched speakers or a home-theater sound system, this isn't going to be an issue. However, if you're expanding an existing system—say, you already have a couple of tower speakers for the left/right front pair, and now you're going to add the left/right rear speakers and a center channel—you'll achieve a more consistent overall sound if you stick to the same brand for the new additions.

# 2

#### Subwoofer Settings

The placement of the subwoofer (the 1 in a 5.1 system) is less critical than for the other speakers. Wherever it fits will usually suffice. However, if your sub has a phase switch (it precisely adjusts the timing of the sound waves), experiment with its settings (usually two) and stick with the one that sounds louder when you're in your listening position. If the sub has its own level control, experiment with that, too. You're after a low-end foundation that sounds solid without overpowering the higher frequencies.

# 4

#### Listen To The Room

If your audio sounds too harsh or too dull, it may be your furnishings rather than your speakers. Lots of hard, reflective surfaces—bare wood, tile, large panes of glass—will overemphasize audio energy and sound glaring. Lots of soft, cushioning material—carpet, plush furniture, drapes—will soak up audio and have a subduing effect. If your furnishings run to one extreme, add some elements of the other to achieve a happy medium.



BY BRIAN HODGE



small in size and big in sound, all iHome systems reinvent your iPod experience. compact yet sleek, powerful yet astonishingly clear, each iHome system features the crystalline sound of Reson8™ Speakers, a charging dock fit for all docking iPods (including nano), and an individualized design to suit your life-sound-style, at home or on the go.

**iH5.** clock radio companion with Wake to iPod/Sleep to iPod functionality. moonlights as clever home stereo. **iH36.** easy-install, space-saver solution to sneak under your kitchen or workshop cabinetry. remote control for those butter-burning, phone-ringing moments. sound good? visit [ihomeaudio.com](http://ihomeaudio.com) for more info.

**iHome**<sup>™</sup>  
[www.ihomeaudio.com](http://www.ihomeaudio.com)



Available at:

Brookstone KOHL'S LINENS-N-THINGS TARGET

# Digicams By The Dozens

## A Shopping Guide For Your Next Digital Camera Purchase

W

hen writers here first started reviewing digital cameras about nine years ago, even lackluster, entry-level models were pricey niche products that took just so-so shots. Sure, reviewing photos immediately after taking them on a camera's LCD (if it had one) and easily posting them to the Web or emailing them was definitely cool, but many early digicams struggled to top even a 1MP true resolution. Additionally, rechargeable

batteries were a luxury, smallish 16MB memory cards were the norm, and image quality often couldn't match that of even a disposable film camera. Worse, shelling out about \$500 for such paltry qualities wasn't uncommon.

Oh, how times have changed. Besides offering dramatically better photo quality at every price point—just \$399 now gets you a 7.1MP Canon PowerShot A710 IS ([www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)), for example—digital cameras are far easier to use (as evidenced by the many models that now target children); offer better and more manual features (as evidenced by the exploding number of D-SLR models); have faster image-transfer rates; and have better bundled accessories, which typically include a larger-capacity memory card, longer-lasting rechargeable batteries, software, and more.

With these improvements have come increasingly more buyers. A recent *Time* article reported that nearly 300 million digicams have been sold since 1997, with half of all U.S. and Japanese households owning a digicam and 41% of all European households owning one. Further, even though most industry analysts project digicam sales to peak in 2008 or 2009, the good news for consumers is that camera prices should keep falling, along with prices for storage cards, lenses, and other accessories. Cliché aside, where pricing and features are concerned, there probably has never been a better time to buy a digicam than today, whether



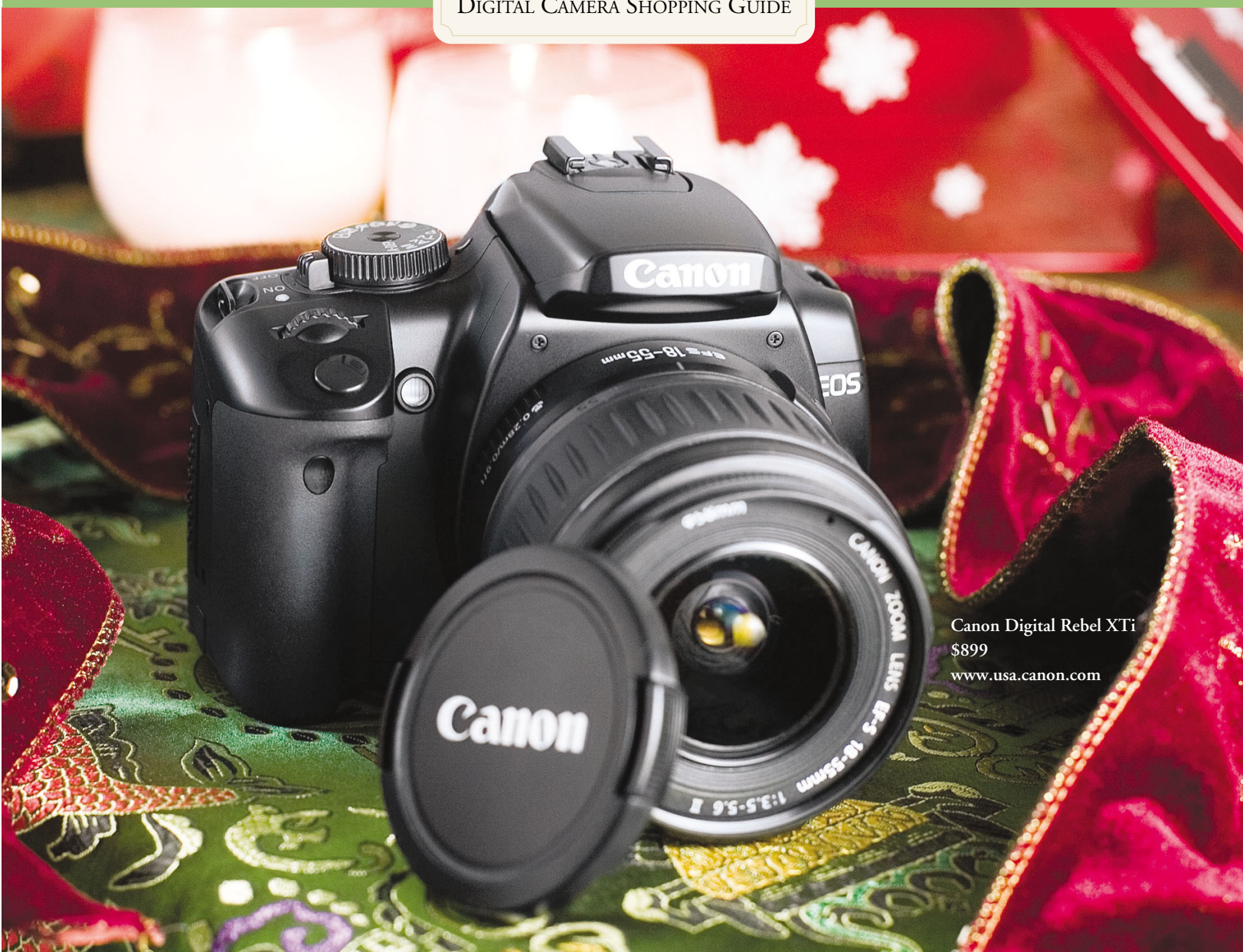
### shelf watch

Digital Foci Image Moments  
\$229 • [www.digitalfoci.com](http://www.digitalfoci.com)

This classic black digital picture frame displays still photos or video on its 8-inch LCD. It supports MP3 audio, so you can play a video or slideshow set to music. The frame supports about 12 memory card formats, so you can transfer photos from camera to frame with ease. With the included wall mounts, you can hang the frame on your livingroom wall and dazzle your friends and family with your latest pictures.







Canon Digital Rebel XT  
\$899  
[www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)

you're a first-time buyer looking for an easy-to-use point-and-shoot model or an advanced user upgrading to a more powerful D-SLR model, such as the Canon 10.1MP Digital Rebel XT (\$899) we've had our eye on, for swapping lenses; complete aperture, contrast, and other manual control; and capturing exactly what the camera's viewfinder displays, which many entry-level cameras can't do.

Whatever your experience level is, your first question when buying a digicam should be how will you use it primarily? This will go a long way toward helping determine if you're better

suited for an entry-level model (typically 2 to 4MPs; \$75 to \$250; low zoom ability, automatic settings, and fair-to-good prints), a mid-range model (typically 4 to 6MP; \$200 to \$375; great 8x10 prints; advanced features, such as stabilizing technology; and some manual settings), or a D-SLR model (typically 6MP-plus, stellar prints, faster startup and shooting speeds, complete manual control, numerous shooting modes, and a well-constructed lens and body). Other, equally important considerations include the manufacturer (Canon is the consumer's top dog now), size and style, battery type, LCD size, menu interface,

flash power, ability to shoot video clips, and the bundled package.

The following pages address these factors and other buying decisions in more detail, including deciding how many megapixels you really need, the Top 5 things to know about digicams, must-have accessories, tips for keeping your accessories organized, and our own Top 5 digicam picks. Although the choices and options can seem overwhelming, know that once you settle on a camera, few technologies are as addictively fun to use and as versatile as digital cameras. **FG**

BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG



# The Megapixel Maze

## The Myth & Reality About Megapixels



Here we see the relative size difference when the same photo is printed from files set at 200 and 300ppi resolution.

**A**s long as digital cameras have been available, one spec has ruled supreme: how many megapixels a camera's image sensor has. And because "more" often means "better," it was probably inevitable that a misperception would arise: More megapixels means higher-quality photos.

This isn't quite the case. When you're in the market for a digital camera, megapixels should factor into your purchase decision, but not for the reasons many people believe.

### The Megapixel Misunderstanding

The main thing that megapixels determine is a photograph's size, rather than its clarity or quality.

Let's say your digital camera shoots at a maximum of 2,000 pixels high and 3,008 pixels wide. (This would be a good time to show you the math:  $2,000 \times 3,008 = 6,016,000$ .) Based on the equation, your camera shoots 6MP (or 6 million pixel) photos. If your camera saves your shots in a standard resolution of 300ppi (pixels per inch), that's effectively a 7x10-inch photo.

But let's say you open this photo in an image editor and resize it. In Photoshop Elements (\$89.99; [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)), for instance, you'd go to the Image menu and select Resize and then Image Size. If you change Resolution to 200ppi, while leaving the Resample Image option unchecked, you now have a 10x15-inch picture. You haven't changed the photo's pixels, just the dimensions in which those pixels are contained.

Professional printers can generate film-quality prints from photos set at 200 to 300ppi, so that already gives you a good range of size options.



## How Big Can You Go?

**W**hat size photos can you expect from a given number of megapixels? There's no definitive answer. As we've shown, your photo's resolution will determine its initial size, but that's just the starting point. You can scale it down, and it can potentially be much larger.

We consulted the experts at Photo Craft Imaging ([www.pcraft.com](http://www.pcraft.com)), in Boulder, Colo., one of the country's most trusted processing labs. Photo Craft Imaging shared its resolution chart with us, which stresses that megapixels don't tell the whole story, "Judging a camera by its megapixel rating is like judging a car by the maximum speed indicated on the speedometer."

A digital photo's quality depends on several factors, including the photographer's skill with light and exposure and the quality of the camera's lens, image sensor, and processing. Under identical shooting circumstances, a high-end 8MP D-SLR will deliver better image quality than an 8MP point-and-shoot camera.

Also, the professional laser printers at Photo Craft and elsewhere can enlarge images with far greater precision and preservation of detail than a home photo printer.

Keeping that in mind, this table will give you a good idea of the range of possibilities. Print sizes at 300dpi show exactly what the pixel dimensions equate to with most image sensors. When ordering actual prints, you'd round up or down to the nearest standard size. ●

Resolution In MP	Print Size At 300dpi	Potential Enlargement
2.1	4x5.33	10x13
3.2	5x7	16x20
4.1	>5x7	20x24
5	6.5x8.5	24x30
6.1	7x10	26x40
8.3	7.8x11.7	32x49
10.2	8.5x12.7	33x50
12.4	9.5x14.3	40x60

### How Many Megapixels Will Be Enough?

You can't have too many megapixels, although you may never use them all, and cost isn't nearly the factor it was even a few years ago. Some loose guidelines, however, based on your shooting/printing habits, might help narrow things down.

If you want small prints (say, 4x6) or images for on-screen viewing, a 3MP or 4MP camera should suffice. If you're a more general user who occasionally needs larger prints (8x10), go for something in the 6 to 8MP range. And if you

like poster-sized prints, look at cameras 10MP and above.

To help answer the question of how many megapixels is enough, we also sought the advice of Barrett McGivney,

a sales representative with Calumet Photographic ([www.calumetphoto.com](http://www.calumetphoto.com)). "I always recommend people get the best lens they can, if they're using digital SLRs, because digital cameras are mini-computers, and there's always something new coming," says McGivney. "Compact cameras and point-and-shoots have a [shelf] life of six months to one year; DSLRs around 18 to 24 months, depending on the manufacturer. Because of progressing technology, new features are added, and the previous camera models become old technology, but not obsolete. The camera only becomes obsolete when it stops producing the results you originally bought it for."

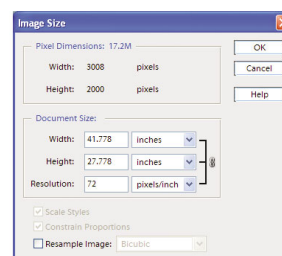
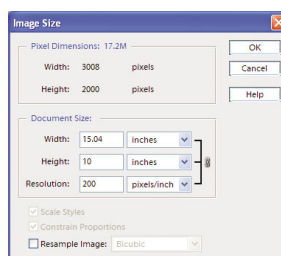
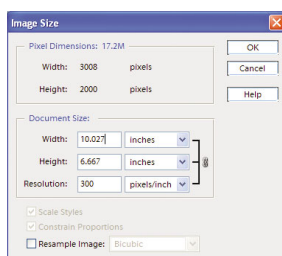
This is excellent advice for D-SLR shoppers. A great lens will retain its worth, and you can later switch it to a newer camera body.

"If a customer is in the market for a compact camera," says McGivney, "I typically suggest a camera around 7MP or 8MP. They're going to produce great images—even up to 13x19. Granted, people may never need to print images that big, but the extra megapixels may help them if they need to crop the image down."

### Final Focus

When shopping for a camera, megapixels matter, but keep them in perspective. Megapixels are just one part of a bigger picture. **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE



When you change a photo's resolution, while simultaneously leaving the resample option inactive, you'll end up with widely different print sizes.

# Top 5 Things To Know About A Digital Camera Before Buying

**1 Megapixels.** Megapixels determine a photo's size more so than its quality. Even point-and-shoot cameras commonly have 6 or 8MP these days, which is more than enough to give you gorgeous 8x10 prints suitable for framing. If you like large, poster-sized shots, you'll be better off with 10MP or better. And if you shoot exclusively for prints measuring 5x7 or less or for viewing on-screen, anything over 4MP will be overkill.

**2 Zoom strength.** This is less of an issue when you're buying a digital SLR. If you need greater magnification than what the included lens delivers, you can buy a separate telephoto lens and swap them whenever the situation demands. However, if you're buying a compact camera, you'll be limited to its built-in capabilities. A zoom of 3X or 4X is average, but some cameras pack as high as 12X. If you anticipate frequent situations in which you'll be shooting from a distance—say, on the sidelines at a sporting event, or in the audience at a school play or music

recital—you'll never regret going for the extra zoom.

**3 Extra features.** Digicams have tons of features these days, but whatever you don't use is just so much menu clutter. We all want clear, quality shots, but beyond that, have a good idea of how you want your camera to perform, so you can look for a model with strong features in that area. For instance, if you want clear photos from low-light situations or while shooting on the move, you might opt for Canon's 6MP PowerShot SD700 IS (\$399.99; [www.canonusa.com](http://www.canonusa.com)), which has an image stabilizer and permits an ISO setting of 800 for quicker shutter speeds.

**4 Battery.** Your camera is probably powered in one of two ways: a Li-Ion battery with its own charger or AA batteries. This won't matter much if you usually shoot close to home (although Li-Ion batteries are often good for hundreds of shots from a single charge, so they're very convenient). It can matter a great deal, however, if you're

buying your camera for travel, particularly overseas travel. You can find fresh AA batteries practically anywhere, but you may not always have an electrical outlet handy, or a few hours to wait for a recharge.

**5 Shooting style.** Cameras come with a combination of manual and automatic controls for exposure, aperture width, etc., but the mix can vary. Some cameras, particularly digital SLRs, are ideal for people who prefer to exercise creative control. Other cameras are geared toward making the shooting process as simple as possible in any circumstances. If you'd rather not consult the camera's light meter, determine the proper aperture setting, and so on, look for a camera with a wide selection of shooting and scene modes. Some models, such as Kodak's 8MP EasyShare P880 (\$399.95; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)), have around a couple dozen for almost any conceivable situation. **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE



# Must-Have Digital Camera Accessories

## Case, Check . . . Extra Battery, Check

**A**h, that new digital camera smell. A new camera may come with extras such as a lens cap, a strap, and a thick manual you'll never read; however, the care and feeding of a digicam goes beyond the basics in the box.

The first accessory you'll want to buy is a camera case. Soft or hard, expensive or not, a padded case will give your digital camera a bit of protection from the bumps and dust ahead. A form-fitting, slip-on cover can protect a camera as you carry it around, but you'll definitely want to purchase a larger storage case with room for the charger and other necessities. For instance, there's Road Wired's The Pod (\$49.95; [www.roadwired.com](http://www.roadwired.com)).

The memory cards that come with a digicam are like a printer's starter cartridges: They don't hold a lot. Plan on shopping for at least one extra card, preferably a big one, such as a Lexar Platinum II 60X SD Card 2GB (\$109.99; [www.lexar.com](http://www.lexar.com)). Today's cameras, with 6MP and more, can make huge photo files, so buy a 1GB or bigger card so you won't run out of room in the middle of a family gathering.

On the other hand, if your camera uses CompactFlash, it's even more important

to buy a high-capacity card such as SanDisk's Ultra II 8GB (\$259.99; [www.sandisk.com](http://www.sandisk.com)). The reason is that you shouldn't swap CF memory cards very often because it's easy to bend the little pins inside a camera's slot as you insert a new card. If you inadvertently do this, it's extremely hard to fix the problem without taking the camera apart or

rechargeable batteries with uncommon shapes, but some point-and-shoot cameras use regular AAs or AAAs.

Sneezes happen, so buy cleaning wipes that are safe to use on your camera's coated lens. We like the Lenspen (\$14.95; [www.lenspen.com](http://www.lenspen.com)) with a microfiber brush on one end and a cleaning substance applicator on the other. Also, a tripod can help you take great group photos by framing everyone evenly (and letting you be in the shot, too). (See "Know How" on page 59 for more tripod info.)

One accessory that's not quite a must-have is a memory card reader. You can use one of these to transfer photos to your computer after you eject the memory card from your camera. However, most digicams come with a USB or other cable to let you upload the pics directly from the camera to the PC. Use the cable method if your camera uses CompactFlash.

After you've explored the possibilities with your new digital camera, you might feel like adding some pricier accessories, such as specialty lenses if your camera supports them. But for now, the items in this article will get you shooting straight. **PG**

BY MARTY SEMS



SanDisk Ultra II 8GB • \$259.99 • [www.sandisk.com](http://www.sandisk.com)

taking it to a repair shop. If your camera uses SmartMedia or another type of memory card that uses metal pads instead of pins, you don't have to worry about this problem.

Extra batteries are also important. If your camera's power runs low during an event, you can pop in a spare and keep on shooting. Most digital cameras take

# Editor's Top 5

## Digital Cameras

Digital cameras are, in my opinion, one of the best CE devices you can buy. What else lets you document your life, share it with friends and family, and preserve it for future generations, all with a device that can fit in your purse? Here are five digital cameras that, if you're in the market for one, won't let you down.



**1 Canon PowerShot A630 (\$299; [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)).** This is one of the best all-around cameras you can buy if you have a budget of \$300. It sports an 8MP resolution and a 2.5-inch LCD, but the real standout feature is the 4X optical zoom, which isn't very common in this price category. I also like the chunky side grip, which makes it very comfortable to hold, and the 21 shooting modes means no messing with settings when you need to capture the perfect shot of your daughter scoring her first soccer goal.

**2 Kodak EasyShare V610 (\$399.95; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)).** You can't help but be struck by how cool-looking this camera is: It features Kodak's Dual Lens Technology, so where we're used to seeing only one lens, there are two. But there is function behind the form, too: It has a 6.1MP resolution, an impressive 10X optical zoom, and a 2.8-inch



LCD. My favorite feature, though, is the embedded Bluetooth, which you can use to send your photos to other Bluetooth devices, such as cell phones.

**3 Casio EX-S770 (\$349.99; [www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)).** If you're anything like me, you often use your digital camera outside. Bright sunlight, however, can make it difficult to clearly see images on the LCD. That's why my



favorite feature of this camera is its Super Bright 2.8-inch screen: It's more than twice as bright as the industry average, letting you clearly see the action on the LCD even when outside. I also love the EX-S770's long battery life (take more than 200 photos without charging) and the intuitive scene modes.

**4 Fujifilm FinePix F20 (\$299.95; [www.fujifilm.com](http://www.fujifilm.com)).** At first, this 6.3MP, 3X optical zoom digicam doesn't seem all that extraordinary, but there are a few features that make it stand out from others in this price

category. First, it features Fujifilm's excellent Intelligent Flash, which senses lighting conditions and automatically adjusts the flash's intensity accordingly.



Second, but just as useful, is the Natural & Flash mode, which takes a photo both with and without the flash at once—perfect for those times when it might be a bit difficult to judge whether you need additional light. Though the MSRP on this model is just under \$300, you can find it almost anywhere for quite a bit less; for instance, at press time, it was on sale at BestBuy.com for \$195.49.

**5 Olympus Stylus 750 (\$399.99; [www.olympus.com](http://www.olympus.com)).** Perhaps the best-looking camera of the bunch, the Stylus 750 is among the most expensive, but the extra few dollars are well-spent if you're looking for higher-end features. I am especially impressed with the 5X optical zoom, as well as the combination digital and optical image stabilization. Anyone who has taken a camera to the beach will appreciate the weather-resistant (and very pretty)



exterior, which protects the device from sand and sea spray, among other elements. With few manual controls, the Stylus 750 is perfect for busy shutterbugs who don't want to mess with f-stops or white balances but who still want crisp and vibrant photos. **PG**

BY KATIE SOMMER



# Lifestyle Close-Up Tips

## Keep It All Organized

### Get It Together

A good camera bag obviously will help keep your digital camera and its accessories organized. You can find a basic bag for around \$10. If you're willing to spend a little more, there are additional options that will keep your gear both neat and safe from those inevitable bumps. We'd recommend something like the Targus Camera/Video Messenger Case (\$19.99; [www.targus.com](http://www.targus.com)). This case holds your camera in one compartment and items such as batteries, cords, adapters, and more in four compartments, keeping everything organized and secure. It's a great way to tote your camera and keep your photography tools in one place whether on the road or at home.

### Plan Ahead

One key to staying organized when you take your digital camera anywhere is to cut the clutter. There are plenty of accessories you could haul around, but you should decide what you'll actually use before you go. For instance, an external flash will improve some photos but is not necessary if you're snapping pictures at your niece's soccer game on a sunny day. Think about the kinds of pictures you'll be taking and what exactly you'll need. If you leave the nonessentials at home, it will be easier to stay organized, and there's less chance that you'll misplace important items.

### Keep Track Of Memories

Memory cards are a vital part of digital photography. They're also easy to misplace and a big reason that photos can get lost. That makes a media card case



an important part of your plan to organize. Whether you're taking extra cards with you or simply storing them at home, a case such as the sleek, aluminum Universal Memory Card Case from X-treme Geek (\$9.99; [www.x-tremegeek.com](http://www.x-tremegeek.com)) is a good idea. This case holds two or more memory cards (depending on what kind of card you use) and two AA batteries. Look around at [BestBuy.com](http://BestBuy.com) to find a case that fits your budget and memory card needs.

### Label Your Photos

Trying to organize an album or slideshow two months after you've taken pictures can be frustrating to say the least. Adding data elements to photos now will save a lot of trouble later. Many cameras have options that let you add the date or even tag photos with event explanations. If you can't do this (or if you'd rather not have a visual tag on your pictures), keeping them in organized folders after

you transfer them to your computer is a must. Depending on how many pictures you take, we'd recommend dividing them into folders by year, month, and then event.

### Back-Up Power

Extra batteries are essential when using power-hungry devices such as digital cameras, and they can be difficult to keep track of. Rechargeable batteries are a practical choice for digital camera users and are a great way to cut down on the number of batteries you need to tote around. When shopping for a camera case, it's a good idea to look for one with storage compartments that will keep your batteries in place. A rogue battery can break the LCD or damage many camera components if it's leaking battery acid. Zippered compartments work best so your accessories don't get lost. **FG**

BY TARA SIMMONS

# The Best Of Both Worlds

Canon's Rebel XTi Satisfies Your Longing For Digital Convenience & SLR Functionality



Canon must know that many camera lovers want the best of both worlds: the convenience of digital photography married to the functionality of SLR cameras. And that's exactly what the Canon EOS Digital Rebel XTi (\$899.99; [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com)) delivers.

## Rebel With A View

If you're used to handling a point-and-shoot digital camera, you'll be amazed with the differences in the quality of the photos you can take with the Rebel XTi. Two standout features that result in better images are the 10.1MP Canon CMOS sensor and the EOS Integrated Cleaning System (see the "Keep It Clean" sidebar).

But how you capture images is different, too. With a point-and-shoot, you hold the camera away from your face in order to focus and frame the photograph through the LCD. But with the Rebel XTi, you look through the viewfinder to focus and frame the image, even if you're using fully automated settings.

The Rebel XTi has a 2.5-inch color LCD, from which you access settings for capturing, previewing, and printing your images. As soon as you hold the camera to your face to snap a picture, however, the Display Off Sensor automatically

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t the risk of sounding sappy and sentimental, we miss the days of using our 35mm SLR film camera.

Of course, we love the conveniences of point-and-shoot digital cameras, such as not buying film, erasing bad photos before printing, and pocket-sized slimness. But we long for our trusty SLR camera, with the interchangeable lenses that could capture wide-angle group shots or zoom in on marvels of nature.



## Keep It Clean

What you may not see with the naked eye can hurt the quality of your digital images.

That's why Canon included its Self-Cleaning Sensor Unit technology in the Rebel XTi. By default, anytime you turn the camera on or off, the Self-Cleaning Sensor Unit will remove dust clinging to the camera's imaging sensor. This should eliminate the dust that otherwise might be visible on the images you capture.

Should dust appear on an image anyway, you can virtually wipe it away with Canon's Dust Delete Data technology, part of the DPP (Digital Photo Professional) 2.2 software included with the Rebel XTi. The camera's imaging sensor isolates dust particles on an image and plots out the coordinates of their location. Then you can use DPP to erase the dust particles because Dust Delete Data is appended to all JPEG or RAW images you take. ●



turns off the LCD so your eye is not distracted by the display.

As you look through the viewfinder, you'll see nine AF (autofocus) points on the subject. The AF point closest to the subject is the one that will focus the picture. However, in some modes you can manually choose the AF point.

The built-in flash will pop up from the top of the Rebel XTi and flash if necessary in Auto mode. When you're finished shooting, just gently press the flash back into place.

Another big difference between the Rebel XTi and point-and-shoot digital cameras is the SLR lens. This camera comes with

the EF-S 18 to 55mm lens and is compatible with dozens of other Canon lenses (see the "Out Of The Box" sidebar).

## Advanced Shooting Modes

Although the Rebel XTi's Auto mode will make even the most novice photographers feel confident about taking quality pictures, every user will want to experiment with the other modes.

The camera's shooting modes are divided into two categories: Basic Zone and Creative Zone. Within the Basic Zone, where all the settings are automatically chosen by the camera, you can use the Portrait mode for close-up shots; Landscape mode for sports and other

motion-filled shots; and Night Portrait mode, ideal for situations where a flash is not permitted or desired, such as in a museum or at a candle-lit ceremony.

As anyone with kids in the house would understand, the Portrait mode immediately piqued our curiosity. We snapped a photo of a red-haired, blue-eyed 3-year-old with this setting in a room with only late-afternoon natural light filtering in through the windows. The results were amazing: vivid colors and a totally focused face. And, as we'll explain later, these crisp colors held true when we printed it.

In the Creative Zone modes, you'll find many advanced settings. For instance,

Tv (time value) is a shutter-priority auto-exposure mode best used for either freezing fast action or for purposely creating a motion blur. The A-DEP (automatic depth-of-field) mode means that objects in both the background and foreground will be in focus. And for the truly creative, the M (manual) setting gives you complete control of the shutter speed and aperture.

We haven't even touched on many other settings and functions, such as the Rebel XTi's continuous shooting mode, which captures three shots per second, or the red-eye reduction tool, which can be used in most modes; we would have to use pages and pages to explain how all of these features work. In any mode, you can switch on the self-timer so you can include yourself in the photo, too.

## Make Room For The MP600

A feature-rich camera like the Rebel XTi deserves a printer that can match it feature for feature. The Canon PIXMA MP600 color photo printer and scanner (\$199.99) does just that.

You can connect the PictBridge-enabled MP600 to your PC or notebook, as well as directly to the Rebel XTi or other compatible digital camera or camcorder. You also can print images directly from compatible memory card slots, such as SmartMedia, Memory Stick/Memory Stick Pro, CompactFlash, and SD card.

The MP600 allows for wireless printing, as well, if you have an infrared-enabled camera cell phone or a Bluetooth-enabled device and optional Canon Bluetooth Unit BU-20 adapter (\$99.99).

## Easy Printing

If you're familiar with the Click Wheel on an Apple iPod, then you'll feel right

at home with the MP600's Easy-Scroll Wheel, which is part of the Operation Panel on the top of the printer. Just dial the wheel to the left or right to select a function, such as copying or scanning.

To access the PIXMA MP600's printing options, you'll need to use the NAVI button, also located on the Operation Panel. The options accessed through this button include printing from a digital camera, printing from a mobile phone, and creating an album from a memory card, among others.

## Out Of The Box

When you purchase a Canon EOS Digital Rebel XTi, you get a lot more than a high-performance camera.

For starters, it comes with a very capable zoom lens, the EF-S 18-55mm f/3.5-5.6. Even better, the Rebel XTi is compatible with Canon's family of more than 60 EF and EF-S lenses and many other accessories in the EOS System, such as EX Speedlite flashes. Whatever your lens needs are, the Canon XTi can accommodate you.

You also need quality software, and the Rebel XTi delivers here, too. The EOS Digital Solution Disk 13.0 contains ZoomBrowser-EX 5.7 for viewing and editing images; Digital Photo Professional 2.2, an image-processing program loaded on the camera; PhotoStitch 3.1 for merging images; and EOS Utility 1.1, software that enables the camera and computer to communicate.

Along with this, you'll get a battery pack and battery charger, camera strap, USB cable, video cable, instruction manual, and pocket guide. ●

Printing images directly from the Rebel XTi is a cinch. With both the camera and printer turned off, connect the two with the camera's USB cable—the cable connects in the front of the MP600, a big plus to us—and then turn on the printer and the camera (in that order).

Next, press the Display button on the back of the camera so you can view the photo you want to print. Then press Set. At this point you can access a variety of printing options on the back of the camera, such as the size of the print—choices include 4x6, 5x7, 8x10, 8.5x11, and credit card size—and whether you want to add a border.

Earlier we mentioned the photo we took of the red-haired child. The vivid colors we saw in the image on the Rebel XTi's display saturated the paper when we printed the image in an 8x10 size, and it took only 30 seconds or so to print.

## Satisfied Shutterbugs

Our experience with the Rebel XTi and PIXMA MP600 indicate that shutterbugs of all levels of experience should enjoy the features these two products offer. You can use the camera as a point-and-shoot and print images as needed, or you can employ the wide range of customizable settings on the XTi and enlist the MP600 to scan your nondigital photos from decades ago and edit the images on your computer.

However you choose to use these Canon goodies, they'll satisfy your nostalgic longing for a quality 35mm camera and give you the immediate gratification of printing images at home. **FC**

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BY RACHEL DEROWITZSCH



# Digital Studio Shopping Tips

## Crop, Color, Print

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

**W**hether you're a professional photographer or a casual weekend shooter, a photo-editing program can correct imperfections and make your photos better than the original. Whether you want to crop a photo, change it to black-and-white, or overhaul the colors and tones, there are plenty of photo-editing packages on the market to suit your needs and budget. Here are some thoughts to consider when shopping for photo-editing software.

As you compare software, one of the most important things to consider is the system requirements. Without adequate memory, hard drive space, and a compatible operating system, your computer won't run the new program. Although most new computers can run today's photo-editing packages, it's worth double-checking before buying the program.

Before you can edit your photos, you must upload them to your computer. Some photo-editing programs interact directly with your digital camera, scanner, or media card reader to make the uploading process easy.

Some programs support photo sharing on the Web at sites such as Kodak Gallery ([www.kodakgallery.com](http://www.kodakgallery.com)) and Snapfish ([www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com)). This makes uploading photos easy and eliminates the need to switch programs. Look for a program that interfaces with the photo-sharing site you already use. Also, consider which programs and photo-sharing sites let you order prints.

As with any electronic gadget or software program, more features means more editing techniques to master. Consider what you want to change in your photos, along with your technical ability. There's no sense in buying a package with hundreds of advanced features if you only need a handful of basic editing functions. That said, also consider the number of wizards available in each package, as this can make a difference in your ability to learn and use the software.

Most digital cameras capture pictures in JPEG format. Some digital cameras support other formats, such as RAW, as well. Likewise, most photo-editing programs support JPEG, but not all support RAW and other formats. Double-check to see which formats the software you are considering supports, keeping in mind that you may want support for multiple image formats, especially if you'll be scanning photos or copying them from a friend's camera in addition to uploading them from your digital camera.

## SHOPPING CHECKLIST

### ☐ How much do you want to spend?

- ☐ Less than \$200
- ☐ \$201 to \$500
- ☐ More than \$500

### ☐ How many features do you want?

- ☐ Keep it easy
- ☐ Moderate
- ☐ Lots of features

### ☐ Can you share photos online?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

### ☐ Can you order prints from within the program?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

### ☐ What formats does the program support?

- ☐ JPEG
- ☐ RAW
- ☐ BMP
- ☐ TIFF

### ☐ Notes

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# Photography Technique Tip

## Add Movement



A slow shutter speed adds drama to our photo by letting us see the child swinging.



With a faster shutter speed, we froze the motion of the swing.

**Y**ou've probably seen beautiful landscape pictures of a bubbling brook or waterfall that portray a sense of motion by showing slightly blurred water with the nearby landscape in sharp focus. Or perhaps you've seen a picture of a windmill with blurred blades taken on a windy day. By adding a sense of movement to your pictures, you can create some unique shots.

In order to add movement to a picture, you'll need to slow down the camera's shutter speed. To change shutter speed, switch your camera to shutter priority mode, often denoted by TV (time value) or S. Shutter priority mode lets you select the shutter speed, but it will still automatically set the aperture, ISO, and other settings. You can also use Manual mode and choose all camera settings, but we like shutter priority mode for ease of use in this situation.

We measure shutter speed in seconds and fractions of a second. The baseline for measuring shutter speeds is 1 second. Shutter speeds shorter than one second, expressed in numbers such as 2, 4, 8, 15, 30, etc. up to 4000, represent fractions of a second. For example, a shutter speed of 4 tells the camera to leave the shutter open for 1/4 of a second. A straight-line quotation mark (") denotes shutter speeds longer than one second. For instance, if you want your camera's shutter to remain open for four seconds, set the shutter speed to 4". Thus, a shutter speed of 4 is 1/4 of a second; a shutter speed of 4" is four seconds. Finally, some cameras also have a bulb mode, denoted by B. Bulb mode lets you keep the shutter open for as long as you press the shutter button.

Because shutter speeds are measured in fractions, an increase in shutter speed number decreases the amount of time the shutter is open. Shutter speeds typically increase or decrease by a factor of two as you move along the continuum: A shutter speed of 2, or 1/2 of a second, is twice as long as a shutter speed of 4, or 1/4 of a second. Likewise, a shutter speed of 4" (four seconds) is twice as long as 2" (two seconds).

Generally, the slowest shutter speed you can use while holding your camera is 1/60 of a second. Most motion-blur photos require shutter speeds slower than 1/60 of a second. For this reason, you'll need a tripod in order to get a good motion-blur shot. It's also a good idea to use a remote shutter release or timer so you don't accidentally move the camera when pressing the shutter button.

Slow shutter speeds add movement to photos and create a unique effect. The shutter speed best for your shot will depend on how much movement you want to show, the speed of the subject, and the available light. **FG**

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON



# Top 5 Things To Know About Digital Camcorders

**D**igital camcorders are small and light, offer brilliant picture quality, and make sharing and editing your videos a simple and fun experience. But faced with the mountain of digital camcorders available and the avalanche of features they boast, simply choosing a unit that fits your lifestyle can be a daunting task. Read on for a handful of things to keep in mind as you deliberate about which digital camcorder to purchase.

**1 Media.** Currently, digital camcorders can store video on cassette tapes, DVDs, built-in hard drives, or flash memory. Cassette tape-based digital camcorders record using MiniDV and Digital8 formats. MiniDV camcorders are known for their superior video quality and small tape size. Digital8 camcorders are generally cheaper, utilize Digital8 cassettes, and can play back analog formats, including Hi-8 and 8mm tapes. DVD-based digital camcorders can record video directly to mini DVDs that you can play in most DVD players. Hard drive-based digital camcorders don't use removable media like other formats and rely on USB or FireWire connections to transfer video to your PC. Flash-based digital camcorders use either built-in or removable flash memory to store your videos.

**2 Optical vs. Digital Zoom.** You'll want a digital camcorder with as high an optical zoom as you can afford. The difference between digital

and optical zoom is an important distinction. Optical zoom is preferable because it lets you zoom from true wide-angle to telephoto ranges. Alternately, digital zoom magnifies a portion of the viewable screen and uses digital interpolation, or a mathematical best-guess, to magnify the pixels. This often results in a degraded image. Most digital camcorders are currently available with between 10X and 30X optical zoom.

**3 Ease Of Use.** Even if you consider yourself an electronics wiz, make sure your digital camcorder is easy to use. You won't always be the one looking through the viewfinder. Often, friends and family, including your kids, will want to take a shot at being the director. Some digital camcorders, such as select Sony Handycams, feature an Easy button that lets you reduce the manual settings to only a few key options. Also, make sure the zoom, play, record, and menu buttons are easy to use with a

single hand, regardless of the user's hand size.

**4 Shoot Still Photos.** Just about every digital camcorder lets you shoot stills, but you should note that the higher-megapixel still-image sensors will typically drive up the cost of your digital camcorder. On the other hand, if you can shelve your digital camera in favor of a digital camcorder that performs as well or better than your digicam, you could save yourself from having to tote both.

**5 Bells & Whistles.** Make sure to choose a digital camcorder that has the features you'll use. For instance, if you'll be filming soccer games, dance recitals, and other fast-paced activities, make sure your digital camcorder has image stabilization capabilities. If you plan to become the next Martin Scorsese, get an HD camcorder with a large-diameter lens for filming those breathtaking vistas and dramatic close-ups. If you're looking to record family moments, such as weddings, birthdays, and holiday gatherings, choose a digital camcorder that includes video-capture software to make copying, editing, and sharing your videos and images easy. **FG**

BY ANDREW LEIBMAN

# Know How

## One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

No camera comes remotely close to being as sophisticated as the human eye. Objects and scenes that look normal to us under various light sources or lighting conditions can, when captured by the digital camera, inadvertently end up with an overall color cast that looks unnatural. Normal incandescent bulbs can make things look yellow or orange, fluorescent lights often tint toward green, and so on.

That's why most digital cameras feature a White Balance control, to eliminate these errors by telling the camera what kind of lighting to compensate for. Common settings include Sun, Clouds, and the aforementioned types of bulbs.

When we forget to use the White Balance control, or when it delivers unexpected results, our photo editors can serve as a second line of defense. Each program below has tools to restore a photo's proper color scheme. We'll use a different sample photo in each editor to demonstrate a greater range of applications.

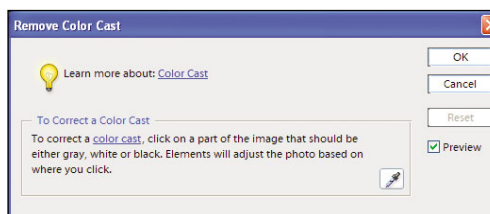
### Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

1

This photo has a slight yellowish cast that is most apparent on the sundial's gray stone.



4

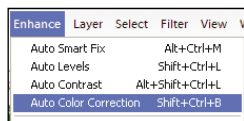


A dialog box prompts you to click the dropper on a feature that should be pure black, pure white, or a neutral gray. Whatever your selection is, Photoshop Elements analyzes it and adjusts the photo's white balance accordingly. Use the dialog box's Preview checkbox to judge your results, click Reset, and try again until you're satisfied.

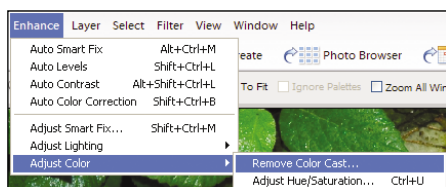
5

2

First, try the simplest method: Choose Auto Color Correction from the Enhance menu.



3



In this case, it worked fine. But for a more precise method, return to the Enhance menu, select Adjust Color, and then select Remove Color Cast.



The stone is now gray where it should be. It's the subtlest correction among our three illustrations, but when it comes to your photos, subtlety often matters just as much as more obvious errors.



## Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

1

Here, the problem is a blue tint. Sunlight contains a prominent blue spectrum that can turn into visible shading.



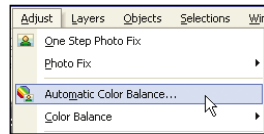
5

That's better still—a warmer, more natural look.

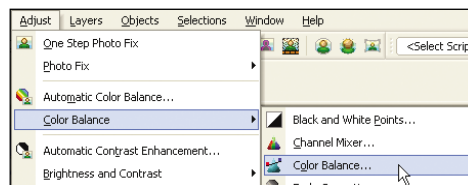


2

From the Adjust menu, choose Automatic Color Balance. This opens a separate workspace, so maximize the window to get the widest before/after views of your photo.



6



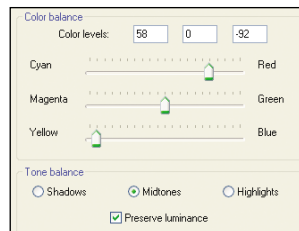
If your color cast isn't a warm/cool problem (as in our other two sample photos), open the Adjust menu and select Color Balance, then select it again in the submenu.

3



Click the Remove Color Cast checkbox and adjust the Strength slider until you get more realistic results.

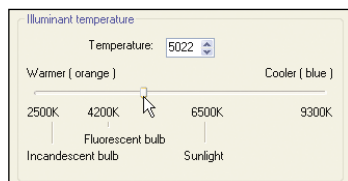
7



The sliders let you manipulate a wider range of colors. Targeting the Midtones, we've shifted the Yellow/Blue balance strongly toward yellow and the Cyan/Red balance moderately toward red.

4

You can further refine the effect by adjusting the Illuminant Temperature, which can help compensate for different lighting sources. Here we need a warmer look, so we'll drag it to the left from its default Sunlight position.



8

Experiment until you're happy! Here, the results are even more satisfactory than the automatic correction.



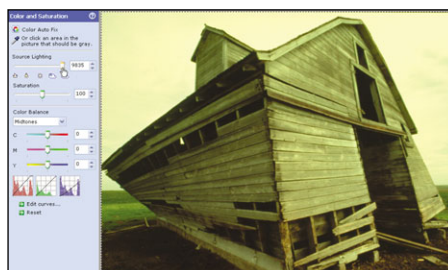
## Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

1

In this photo, atmospheric conditions have given everything a greenish tint. Although inaccurate, it is interesting.



5



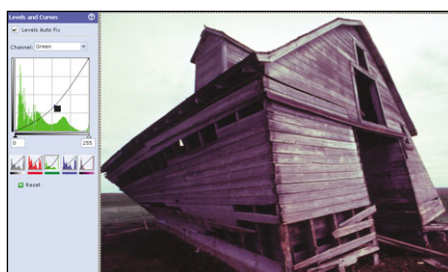
The next option is dragging the Source Lighting slider from its default Sun position to better match lighting conditions. Here, though, compensating for Clouds merely turns the photo yellow.

6



The Color Balance sliders provide a greater range of control than the previous options. Choose the slider that will target your problematic color. Since our color cast is green, we'll drag the center Magenta/Green slider to increase the magenta level for the best results yet.

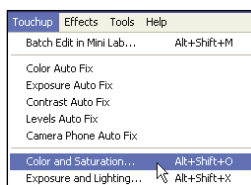
7



Finally, you can get similar results with the Edit Curves option. We've chosen the green channel and dragged the graph into a slightly concave line to reduce green levels.

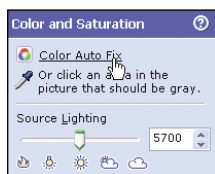
2

Choose Color And Saturation from the Touchup menu. The activity pane provides several options. If one doesn't work, just click Reset, and another option is sure to help.

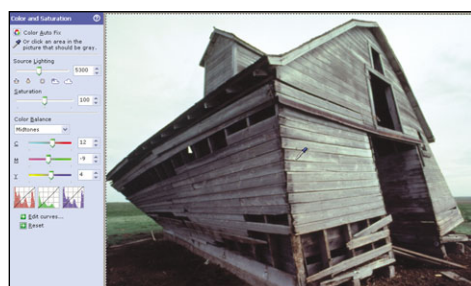


3

First, try the Color Auto Fix command. Here it makes a negligible difference.



4



You can also try clicking the dropper tip on a photo feature that should be neutral gray. There's no shortage of gray in the weathered wood, so it wasn't tough to get good results.



# Know How

## Use A Tripod



**A**sk any group of professional or serious amateur photographers or videographers what their No. 1 accessory is, and most will probably tell you a tripod. A tripod provides a solid foundation when you need to keep your camera or camcorder immobile or keep its movement under careful control.

Here are a few common situations in which a tripod is essential:

- Using a slow shutter speed (say, 1/30 second or slower), for example, under low-light conditions.
- Timed exposures when you intend to step around in front of the camera or when you join the action in a video.
- Macro and landscape shots in which even a tiny amount of camera shake could blur detail.
- Framing overlapping shots for panoramic photography.

- Using a telephoto lens of 200 to 300mm or greater or a high zoom level on your compact camera or camcorder.
- Recording an unmoving wide shot of a stage performance.

### Proper Set-Up

Here are a few suggestions to help you get the most from your tripod.

- Unfold the legs enough for as wide a stance as is feasible. The farther apart its feet are, the more stable a tripod will be.

- Extend and lock the telescoping legs from the top down; that is, use the thicker, sturdier sections before the thinner sections.
- Get as close as possible to the working height you need by adjusting the legs, rather than raising the center column. The column should only be elevated to provide the last incremental bit of fine tuning.
- If you're setting up on an uneven surface and your tripod has a bubble level built into the head, use it as a guide while adjusting the legs one at a time.
- Make sure the head's locks are snug, unless you want movement in one direction, such as panning a camcorder.
- On some tripods, there's a hook at the bottom of the center column. If you need extra stability (on a windy day, perhaps), hang a weight such as your camera bag from the hook.
- You'll first attach your camera or camcorder to a release plate by screwing it into a socket on the bottom of the cam. You'll then lock the plate to the tripod head. It will be secure for normal use, but never carry the tripod around this way. If you bump the release lever, the camera could fall and sustain damage.

### Two Heads Are Better Than One

There are two types of tripod heads. The more traditional is the three-way pan-tilt head. The other, the ball head, is a ball-and-socket arrangement that provides a freer range of motion so you can usually adjust it more quickly.

If you want to experiment, Sunpak's Fieldmaster Tripod (\$59.95; [www.sunpak.com](http://www.sunpak.com)) is a budget-friendly model that comes with both types of head.

Whichever type you prefer, a tripod will help keep your shooting stable and your photos focused. **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE

## tips

### Pan & Zoom Your Video

# 1

#### Action!

The way you shoot your camcorder video has a huge effect on how it will look to your viewers later on. Spice things up with a few pans and zooms. Panning means swinging the camera's view right or left as if you're turning your head. When you pan, you reveal more of the people and things in the room, giving your viewers a sense of "being there." Zooming in for a tight shot on someone's face can capture her excitement as she opens a gift. Zooming out for a wider shot can reveal that a new baby is surrounded by his loving family.

# 2

#### Pan Like A Pro

The secret to good panning is to do it smoothly (and usually slowly, unless there's some detail you need to catch in a hurry). Your tripod can help you make steadier pans. Most tripods let you lock the pan mechanism by turning a knob clockwise. The trick is to tighten the pan-lock knob and then loosen it just enough so you can pan the camera with a little bit of resistance from the lock knob's friction. To tilt your shot, or pan it up or down, adjust the tripod's tilt-lock knob the same way.

# 3

#### Don't Zip When You Zoom

To smooth out your zooms, practice with your camcorder. A typical camera has a lever that zooms rapidly or slowly, depending on how far you press it. In the hustle and bustle of taping an event, it's easy to slide the lever too far and zoom more quickly than you wanted to. It can take a while to get used to the feel of your camcorder's zoom lever, so make sure you feel comfortable with it before you zoom during a shot that you'll never get the chance to tape again. If you do wind up with a clumsy zoom, don't make it worse with a second or third zoom to correct the goof. You can always edit the footage later to cut out the bad zoom or cover it by inserting other video while leaving the audio uninterrupted.

# 4

#### Steady On

Jumpy video is really hard to watch. Add in some dramatic pans and zooms, and your "Blair Witchy" home movie might even make some viewers motion sick. Always use a tripod if possible. (See "Know How" on page 59 for more tripod info.) If you don't have a tripod, steady your camcorder on a solid surface such as a counter. If you can only shoot a scene by holding the camera in your hand, turn on the image stabilization feature if there is one. Image stabilization can digitally remove some of the shakiness from handheld video, although it drains the camera's battery a little faster.

# 5

#### Ken Burns, Look Out!

Some DVD authoring software, such as Roxio Easy Media Creator 9 Suite (\$99.99; [www.roxio.com](http://www.roxio.com)), can automatically add pans and zooms to slideshows of your photos. If documentaries can add life and motion to crusty old historical photographs this way, you can make your family photos really come alive.



BY MARTY SEMS



# CE@Home Shopping Tips

## Buy A Notebook PC The Whole Family Will Love

BY JENNIE SCHLUETER

**L**et's face it—it's hard enough to get the whole family to agree on a type of pizza or what to name the new puppy, so making a decision as big as which notebook PC suits everyone in your crew is tough. Here are a few tips to help you buy a notebook that'll make the whole gang happy.

Gather the family and ask what features everyone wants in a laptop. Ask everyone to write a wish list divided into two columns: "need" and "want." Compiling the lists will give you an idea of what features you need to look for and what features you can do without. It'll also give everyone a sense of having had a say in the decision without descending into total chaos and ineffective squabbling.

Some families buy laptops that function as a secondary computer. If you want flexibility to surf wirelessly from any room, get a notebook with an integrated 802.11b/g wireless adapter or at the very least, a 56Kbps modem and Fast Ethernet. Think about networking and compatibility with your main computer. For example, to seamlessly transfer files between the two, don't buy a Mac if you already own a PC.

To use the laptop as the family's sole computer, focus on features, such as the hard drive. It should be big enough (60 to 80GB) to store music and photo files, and you'll need enough memory (at least 512MB) to do things like burn CDs and work with photo editors. Most so-called desktop replacement notebooks meet these requirements, which should include a capable (such as a Pentium-M) processor for your work or play needs.

Imagine trying to view something on your laptop's screen with your kids crowding around, and you can see why screen size is important. You're a little more limited here than if you were buying a desktop PC, of course, because notebooks by their nature are smaller than desktops. But if portability isn't as big of an issue for you as screen real estate, get the biggest screen you can afford. For a notebook, this means 14 inches or wider.

Many families use their notebook as an entertainment center on the road. If this is where you're headed, you'll want to make sure you have the right components. A combination DVD/CD-RW drive will give you all the functionality you need to watch movies on the road, burn and listen to your own music, and even plug directly into your home-theater system. Just keep in mind that watching movies will really sap your battery life, so if you don't have an A/C adapter to plug into the car, keep a rechargeable battery pack handy. And unless you want to listen to your kids' shows all the way across the country, don't forget the headphones!

### SHOPPING CHECKLIST

#### ☐ What are your power plans?

- ☐ Standard A/C
- ☐ Supplemental battery pack

#### ☐ What kind of input device do you want?

- ☐ Touchpad
- ☐ Stylus
- ☐ USB or wireless mouse

#### ☐ How much warranty can you afford?

- ☐ One year is plenty
- ☐ With my kids? Extended is probably the way to go.

#### ☐ What size hard drive do you want?

- ☐ 40GB
- ☐ 60GB
- ☐ 80GB
- ☐ 100GB

#### ☐ Notes

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# Where Form & Function Meet

## Our Favorite Laptop Bags

**T**hat shiny new laptop isn't a wallflower—nor is it meant to stay at home. It wants to see and be seen, even if that only means a trip to the library or corner coffee shop. Invest in a cozy bag to ensure its safe passage. Gone are the days where safely toting around a laptop meant dragging

an ugly utilitarian monstrosity behind you. Options abound—ones that are chic, hip, and stylish—all while being functional. And without looking like you snagged it from a Soviet warehouse.

The following bags are some of our favorites. As with everything, though, the best bag for an individual will depend on her situation. The needs of a college

student differ vastly from those of a businesswoman or stay-at-home mom. However, it needs to get your laptop and all those extras you just can't leave at home (such as a power cord, cell phone, and wallet) to your destination safe and sound and in one piece. **FC**

BY SALLY MAREK CURRAN

### Melissa Beth Designs' Pocket Full Of Puter

\$198; [www.melissabethdesigns.com](http://www.melissabethdesigns.com)

At nearly \$200, the Pocket Full Of Puter tote is far pricier than the other bags in our roundup, but it's fun enough to warrant saving your pennies. Reminiscent of a suitcase you might have taken to grandma's when you were little, this tote is designed to take a beating. It's trimmed with leather to protect the edges and has a foam compartment outfitted with straps to keep your laptop snug. It's available in orange, pink, grey, blue, and green (our favorite); each is lined with contrasting fabric. The removable, padded shoulder strap lets you decide how you'd like to carry it. It's 14 x 12 x 12 inches (HxWxD) and can accommodate a 15.4-inch notebook.



### Wrapables.com's White Palazzo Damask Laptop Tote

\$49.95 (regular), \$59.95 (large); [www.wrapables.com](http://www.wrapables.com)

The White Palazzo Damask Laptop tote is available in two sizes; the smaller size (14x10x1.5) is perfect for when you just need to grab your laptop and run, while the larger size (16x12x4) is better for those occasions when you have a bit more to carry. Both bags have water-resistant exteriors (for when you're stuck in inclement weather) and removable straps. There's room in both bags for a magazine or two, and the larger size allows for stowage of cables and essentials with a collection of interior pockets. Both totes have a padded lining in contrasting tones.



## Mobile Edge Faux-Croc Signature Tote

\$99.99; [www.mobileedge.com](http://www.mobileedge.com)

The Signature Tote (we liked the faux croc; a black-and-taupe patterned variety is also available) has a little bit of everything. It can accommodate laptops with screens up to 15.4 inches in a cushy, dedicated pocket to keep them well-protected from the perils of commuting and travel. A pocket for a Bluetooth-capable cell phone or PDA purportedly keeps your data safe from would-be hackers. The tote measures 18x14x5 and boasts a detachable wristlet for essentials. The straps should stay snugly on your shoulder, while its silver buckles provide a bit of class. Self-healing zippers (which are especially useful when you're in a hurry and on-the-go) keep everything safely inside. Mobile Edge stands behind the Signature Tote with a lifetime guarantee—and that's something everybody can appreciate.



## Samsonite Women's Ultima Notebook Tote

\$69.99; [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)

Samsonite's Ultima Notebook Tote is a classy option for ladies on the go. The nylon twill exterior is lightweight, but it's tough enough to stand up to a lot of abuse. The silver hardware and black straps help the bag pass for a purse for those occasions where you need to both have access to your laptop and look your best. A magnetic tab keeps your notebook safely in the padded compartment, and a bevy of pockets and slots will help keep everything else organized. The bag is fully lined, and there's a removable ID/logo plate. There's no zipper across the top of the tote to completely close off the bag, so this could be a plus or a minus depending on your needs.

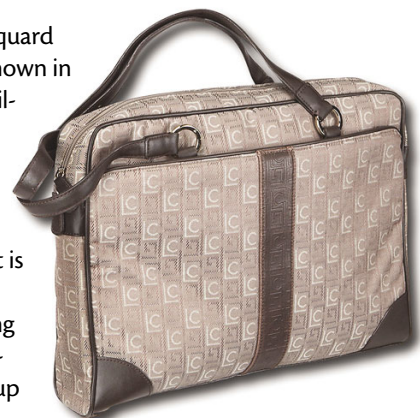


## Liz Claiborne Jacquard Notebook Case

\$49.99; [www.bestbuy.com](http://www.bestbuy.com)

Liz Claiborne's Jacquard Notebook case (shown in camel; it's also available in black and black/brown) is stylish and reasonably priced.

The jacquard print is set off with contrasting PVC edging to protect the corners, so it'll stand up to the rigors of everyday use. There's room for notebooks with up to a 15.4-inch display (although the specs do say "most" 15.4-inch notebooks, so if you have a bulky model, you might want to check that your PC will fit before you toss that receipt). A variety of compartments and pockets will keep accessories and everyday essentials organized and easy-to-find.





# What Will Be HOT In 2007?

**For Starters, Get Your Game Face On**

A

s last year drew to a close, we naturally looked ahead to the coming 12 months, wondering what's over the horizon. For more than a few of us, that horizon includes what's coming to the shelves of the nearest Best Buy. To get a sense of 2007, we

spent some quality time with Matt Swanston, director of business analysis for the Consumer Electronics Association ([www.cea.org](http://www.cea.org)), and consulted a few other sources, as well.

The short answer to the burning question of what's going to be hot in 2007 is pretty much everything! The CEA expects another year of record sales across the board; sales in recent

years have been growing in the neighborhood of 10%. So, we approached our query from the opposite perspective: Are there any product categories that have reached a saturation point and could expect declining sales? Nope, not even that. To understand why, it helps to understand consumers' overall buying patterns.

"Most people replace [gadgets] before they break. It's not like a refrigerator that you use until it doesn't work anymore," Swanston says. "Newer models come out and people want something before their old one's done in, like cell phones and iPods and TVs, so they give that one to their kids, or parents, and that gives them an excuse to get a new one."

Now let's look at the hottest of the hot categories.

## Portable Music Players

Apple's iPod has seemed unbeatable ever since its 2001 introduction, but that hasn't stopped other manufacturers from trying to knock it off its pedestal.

Swanston doesn't expect any one rival to accomplish that. Instead, he thinks it's more likely that Apple will eventually lose market share to the more modest successes of many specialized players.

"There are so many different varieties," he says. "The diversity has gotten to a level now that buyers have a lot of options to choose from. People can get exactly the kinds of player features and accessories they want."

For instance, if you need something submersible for your pool workouts, there's the SwiMP3 (\$249.99; [www.waterproofmp3player.com](http://www.waterproofmp3player.com)). Microsoft's Zune, which was announced for the 2006 holiday season (\$249.99; [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)), promises wireless music sharing that doubles as a social networking tool.



## shelf watch

Canon PowerShot SD800 IS  
\$449.99 • [www.usacanon.com](http://www.usacanon.com)

Digital cameras are among everyone's favorite consumer electronic devices, and Canon is one of our favorite manufacturers. In late 2006, Canon released a few cameras to commemorate the ELPH's 10th anniversary. The SD800 IS is an attractive 7.1MP ELPH with a 2.5-inch LCD and Canon's acclaimed Optical Image Stabilizer technology. It's compact and portable, and if you need another reason to consider it, it's also pretty sleek looking.



## Digital Television

With sales of around \$22 billion this year, digital display technologies are the top dog of the electronics industry, and that's not likely to change. "It's been hot for a while," Swanston says, "but the pickup continues as prices come down."

CEA Director of Industry Analysis Sean Wargo concurs. "As consumers prepare for the [national broadcasters'] transition to digital television, we will see more of the shipment volumes move to digital displays as analog sets' days are increasingly numbered."

## The Apple Of Our Eye

Following up on the success of the iPod and the iTunes Music Store ([www.itunes.com](http://www.itunes.com); with a 75% market share for portable players and 88% for legal music download sales), Apple Computer is poised to branch out even farther from the desktop and laptop.

In a September presentation introducing new iPods and the availability of movies in near-DVD quality at the iTunes Store, Apple CEO Steve Jobs also provided a rare sneak preview of its newest product,

code-named iTV (\$299; [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)). The name should change before it hits the market in the first quarter of 2007, but its function is set. It's a slim box that adds your entertainment center to your home's wireless network, so you can stream your iTunes player's movies, TV shows, and music (and photos) from a Mac or PC to your TV and sound system. Everything is remote-controllable through a slick visual interface.

And that may be just the beginning. Although Apple

is famously tight-lipped when it comes to products in development, industry watchers expect 2007 to be the company's most diverse year yet, with two likely major innovations:

**A video-centric iPod.** To stay competitive, an iPod with a larger screen is widely regarded as inevitable.

**The iPhone.** A few years ago, Apple registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office a design for a communications device that can only be construed as a cell phone. According to Shaw Wu, an analyst with

American Technology Research, it's ready to go in the first half of 2007: "Our research indicates that an Apple-designed smartphone has moved from concept to prototype and recently has progressed to near-completion as a production unit."

This argument has been bolstered by the presence of resource files in the newest version of the iTunes software player that appear to provide phone-synch capabilities.

Whatever Apple unveils in 2007, it's a sure bet to be a hot seller.



## DVD Players & Recorders

Here we can expect a notable resurgence over recent years. With the average price of a DVD recorder now below \$100, they've become more attractive on a larger scale.

As well, 2006 saw the rollout of two types of high-resolution DVD players—Blu-ray Disc and HD DVD—among them, Samsung's BD-P1000 Blu-ray player (\$999; [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)) and Toshiba's HD-A1 HD DVD player (\$499.99; [www.toshiba.com](http://www.toshiba.com)).

The CEA expects sales of these two young technologies to pick up quickly in the next few months. Complicating things, however, is that Blu-ray and HD DVD are competing formats, each with prominent backers among manufacturers and content providers. If the 1980s' Betamax/VHS videotape showdown is a guide, there can be only one winner. So which will it be?

"It's anybody's guess. A number of things could impact that," Swanston says, "like who [the manufacturers'] partners are. And the price point—who's willing to take the hit at close to [profit] margin." Ultimately, though, "It's all about the content, the movies."

Then again, it's possible that the formats could successfully coexist. After initially backing Blu-ray, HP announced that its computers would also support HD DVD. Because discs are the standard size (not a factor in the Betamax/VHS war), we may see more manufacturers support both, the way several have provided dual-compatibility players for SACD and DVD-Audio, competing high-resolution audio formats.

Samsung, another heavyweight Blu-ray backer, is already reportedly considering the manufacture of a hybrid video player. Consumers hate to buy into a losing format, so if universal players emerge in 2007, that should open the floodgates for worry-free sales.

### Keep Watching The Shelves

Other projected big sellers for 2007 are cameras and camcorders, particularly among parents and new parents, and computers, which continue to fall in price while increasing in power.

Twelve months from now, we expect to be doing our best Sinatra impersonation, singing, "It was a very good year." **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE

## Get In The Game

When Microsoft initially released the Xbox 360 (\$399.99; [www.xbox.com](http://www.xbox.com)) in late 2005, it gave itself a big advantage in the race for dominance among the next generation of gaming consoles. Never mind that it took the company months to catch up with demand. By the time Microsoft managed that, its two rivals were still many months away from releasing their own consoles.

Hard-core enthusiasts eagerly anticipated the latecomers—PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii arrived in mid-November—and that'll heat up the competition for gamers well into 2007.

The Xbox 360's most direct rival is Sony's PlayStation 3 (\$499; [www.us.playstation.com](http://www.us.playstation.com)). If you have even a passing familiarity with the Xbox, you know what to expect: plenty of the high-end flash, dazzle, sound, and fury beloved by hard-core gamers, as well as a built-in Blu-ray drive.

Then there's the Nintendo Wii (\$250; [www.nintendo.com](http://www.nintendo.com)). Rather than going head-to-head in horsepower, the Wii (pronounced "we") is banking on a console with broader family appeal, supplementing games with interactive channels for news, weather, and TV-based Web browsing.

It's a smart strategy for Nintendo, and record sales are expected for the industry overall.

"The fourth quarter of 2006 is when things really heated up in the gaming market," says Sean Wargo, CEA Director of Industry Analysis, "with continued growth expected through 2007, reaching \$15 billion."





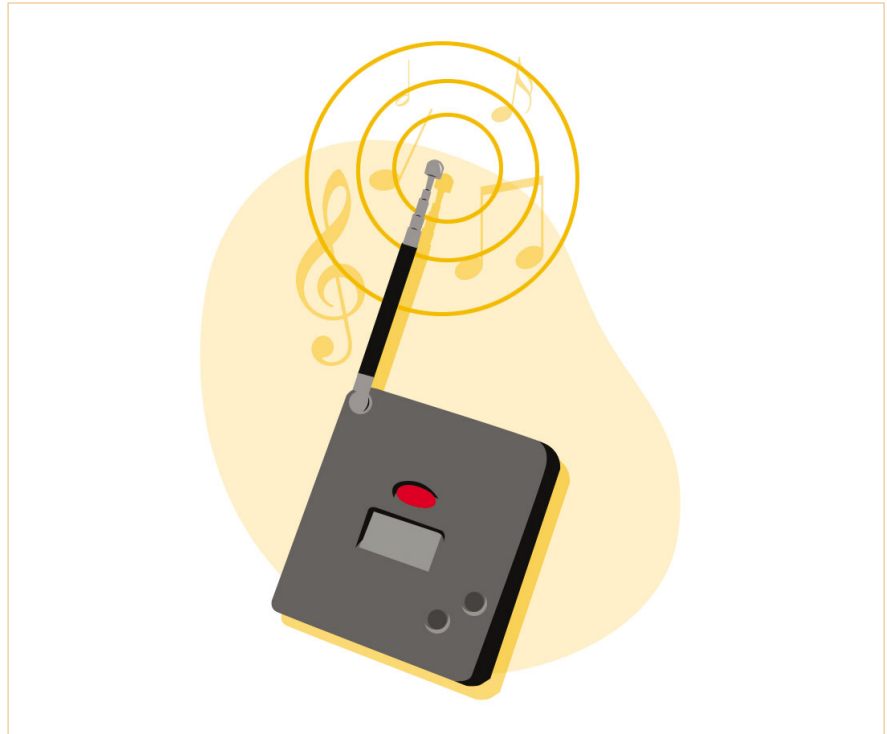
# Know How

## Use An FM Transmitter

It's only natural for us to want to listen to our iPods in the car; 250 of our favorite albums can make that long road trip a pleasure. It's illegal to use earbuds while driving, though, and anyway, you want your passengers in on the fun, too. Invest in an FM transmitter instead, which lets you listen to your tunes via your car's speakers by streaming it to an empty FM frequency. Here's a primer on how to use yours.

First, make sure your FM transmitter is compatible with your MP3 player. Some models, such as Belkin's TuneFM for iPod (\$49.99; [www.belkin.com](http://www.belkin.com)), will work only with iPods; others, such as Belkin's TuneCase II (\$39.99), work with almost any MP3 player. A list of compatible players should be available on the transmitter manufacturer's Web site and be sure to check the player's site for units made especially for your model, as well. Of course, every FM transmitter is different, and some will feature special docks or other equipment that are unique to that device. The majority of models, however, have a cable and minijack, and those are the ones we'll focus on here.

Unplug your earphones from your MP3 player and plug the FM transmitter's minijack into the MP3 player's headphone jack. Next, power on your transmitter, player, and car stereo. Tune to an empty station on your car stereo; you'll know it is "empty" when all you can hear is static. Navigate to that same station on your transmitter.



(Note that some FM transmitters have only a few select frequencies to choose from; others only use odd-numbered frequencies. If that's the case with yours, make sure your car's radio is tuned accordingly.) With both devices tuned to the same station, you should be able to hear your MP3 player's tracks.

The problem with FM transmitters is that the sound quality isn't always the best, especially in metropolitan areas with busy frequencies. If you hear static in your music, try a different frequency. Also, try to position your player and transmitter differently: Many users report much better sound when the transmitter is on the dashboard of the

car or somewhere else very close to the car's stereo.

Here are a few tips that will make using your FM transmitter easier. First, dedicate a secure spot for your MP3 player. It's much safer to change tracks when the device is in your cup holder than if you're fumbling around trying to find it on the floor of your car. Second, familiarize yourself with your FM transmitter's buttons; this will make it safer and easier to adjust them while driving, too. Third, you can use your FM transmitter with your home stereo, if you don't want to invest in a separate stereo dock for your MP3 player. **PG**

BY KATIE SOMMER

# Top 5 Things To Know About MP3 Players

**T**oday's MP3 players do much more than play music. Whether you're an audio book listener, exerciser, or digital photo or video buff, there's likely an MP3 player that matches your lifestyle. The following are five important things to know about MP3 players.

**1 Size.** An MP3 player's size corresponds directly to the storage type it uses. Hard drive-based models, such as Apple's 80GB video iPod (\$349; [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)), can store tens of thousands of songs, but they're larger, heavier, more expensive, and use moving parts, so they're not ideal for exercisers. Some iPods can display photos, movies, and games, typically on a 2.5-inch screen. Players using smaller 1-inch hard drives, such as Philips 8GB GoGear Jukebox HDD1830 (\$200; [www.philips.com](http://www.philips.com)), store less data but are sleeker, and some play video and let you expand the memory. Flash players, such as Sony's 2GB S2 Sports Walkman (\$149.95; [www.sonymstyle.com](http://www.sonymstyle.com)), are much smaller, have no moving parts, and are ideal for exercising. Flash players now top out at about 8GB (SanDisk has the 8GB Sansa e280 [\$249.99; [www.sandisk.com](http://www.sandisk.com)]), but most offer an FM radio tuner, line-in recording, voice recording, and often Bluetooth and video abilities.

**2 Memory.** You'll want to buy a player with as much memory as you can afford, especially if

you're an audiophile. More memory means more capacity so you can store more songs at higher bit rates, meaning you won't have to compress the files nearly as much to fit more onto the player. The more a file is compressed, the more audio quality it loses.

**3 File transfer.** The more easily a player transfers data to/from a computer the better. Most current players connect using a USB cord for USB 2.0-speed transfers, which theoretically transfer data at 480Mbps. Others, such as Creative's MuVo TX FM (\$70; [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)), integrate a USB connector into the player, so there's no cord or software required. Apple's Universal Dock (\$39) and similar docks are also ultra-convenient, letting you easily synchronize data, charge batteries, and possibly play music via external speakers.

**4 Interface and power.** An intuitive interface that doesn't bury the often-used menu functions several levels deep goes a long way toward making a player more enjoyable

to use, particularly if you have thousands of songs stored in dozens of folders. Apple's Click Wheel-driven interface is the best-known example, but try several players from different companies before deciding which interface you prefer. A bright, backlit display and well-labeled buttons, folders, and functions will also make navigation easier. For power, many flash players now use proprietary Li-Ion batteries, while larger hard-drive players typically use a fixed, rechargeable battery you won't remove until you need to replace the battery for good.

**5 Copy protection.** Besides MP3 files, MP3 players usually support additional audio file formats, such as WMA and AAC. iPods support AAC files, for example, but Apple uses its own copy-protection approach, so if you want to buy songs at an online music service, only those available from Apple's iTunes store will play on an iPod. Conversely, services such as Napster support Microsoft's WMA file format. Before you buy a player, check that it supports the file format that the music service you plan to use offers (Microsoft's PlaysForSure Web site, [www.playsforsure.com](http://www.playsforsure.com), is a good resource.). **FG**

BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG

# Gift Of The Month

## Epson StoryTeller Photo Book Creator

W

ith each New Year's Day comes a new beginning and a chance to start fresh. Although we look forward to the future, it's also important

to look back and remember what's come before. With the growing popularity of scrapbooking, people are doing just that by documenting life's events both big and small.

Your mom may not have time to create a labor-intensive photo album using colored paper, stencils, and miscellaneous bobble, but she should at least have the opportunity to preserve memories of years past. So, we've chosen the Epson StoryTeller Photo Book Creator ([www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com)) as our January Gift Of The Month. (Each month we feature a product that you can give with pride to someone you love, and we keep the cost at less than \$50, so it's affordable.) The StoryTeller is available in three sizes: a 5x7-inch book with 10 pages (\$19.99) or an 8x10-inch book with either 10 or 20 pages (\$24.99 and \$29.99, respectively).

### A Helpful Hand

What we like about Epson's StoryTeller is that everything you will need to create your book is provided, including software, photo paper, a hardbound book, and even a protective cover for your finished product. Anyone with a Windows 98SE/Me/2000/XP PC, photo printer, and digital images will be able to create a hard-cover book filled with personal photos and captions to treasure for years to come. And for those of us who are pressed for time and perhaps even creatively challenged, the StoryTeller helps you from start to finish.

Although we think the StoryTeller would make a great gift for just about anyone, we especially like it for people who will be



reaching a milestone in their lives during the upcoming year. Think about significant birthdays (a 16-year-old niece or an uncle who's turning 50), anniversaries (did you know the traditional gift for a first anniversary is paper?), or accomplishments (a graduation, job promotion, or big trip, perhaps).

### The Joy Of Giving

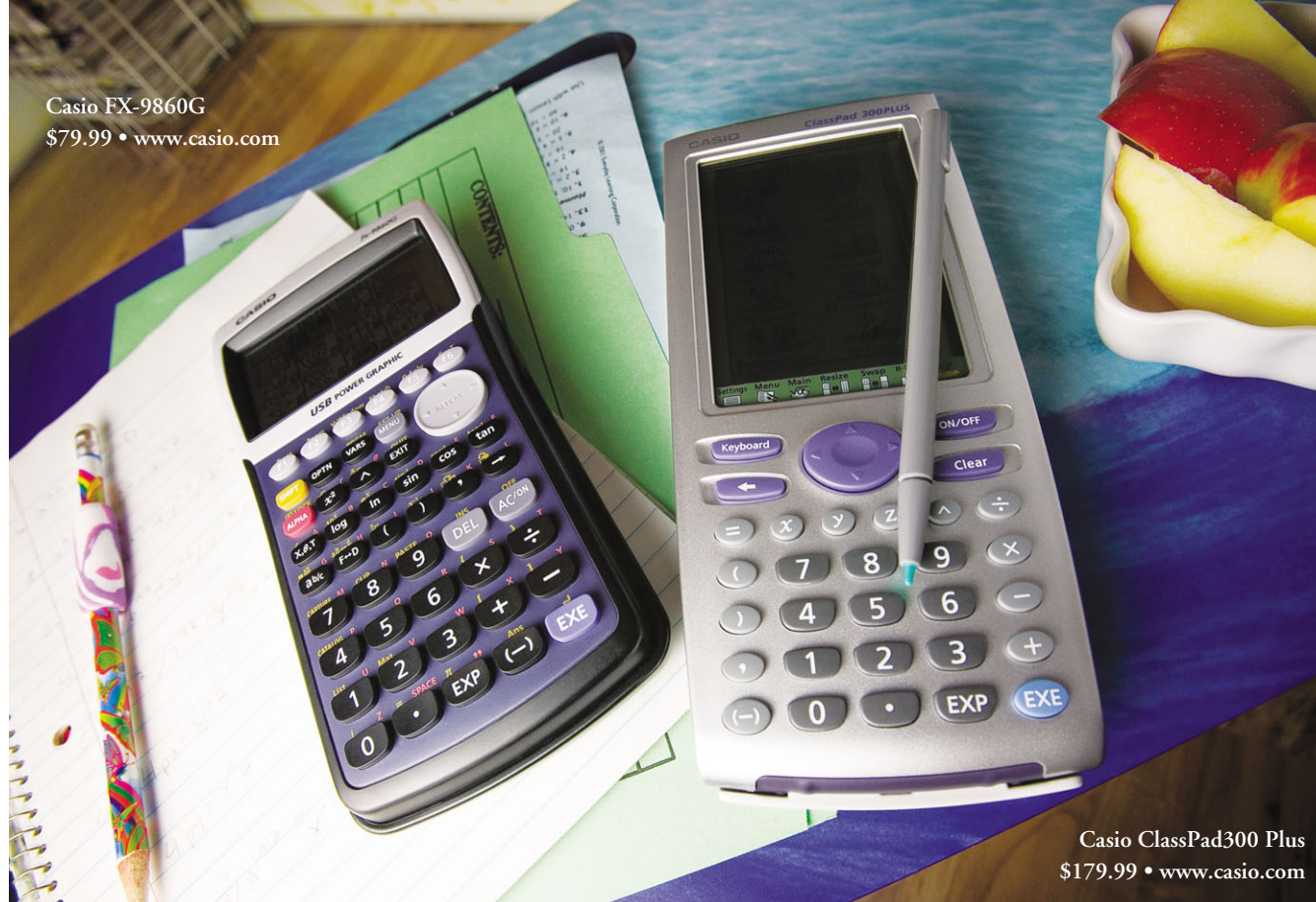
On the other hand, if you know someone who would love a customized photo book for the coffee table but wouldn't be able to create one of her own, consider buying the StoryTeller and creating one for her. Think about how your grandma or grandpa's eyes would light up after opening a book filled with pictures of their grandkids, for example. Or, gather old family photos and scan them to use in a book to display on the gift table at an anniversary party for a special couple.

Whether you give the StoryTeller Photo Book Creator as a do-it-yourself project or as a completed product, the recipient is sure to love it. And because it's personalized with photos, it's a gift that is guaranteed to be enjoyed for years to come. **FG**

BY JOY MARTIN



Casio FX-9860G  
\$79.99 • [www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)



Casio ClassPad300 Plus  
\$179.99 • [www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)

# Kids & Technology

## Graphing Calculators For Teens

**S**tudents need every advantage in the classroom. That's why parents equip them with desktop PCs or laptops, send them to educational camps, or enroll them in after-school clubs.

But don't overlook one tool that most teens, and especially college-bound students, need: a graphing calculator. Such a calculator will help them with algebra, geometry, trigonometry, chemistry, physics, and more.

Casio ([www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)), HP ([www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)), and Texas Instruments ([www.education.ti.com](http://www.education.ti.com)) make many of the graphing calculators suitable for students. Generally, the calculators fall into one of two categories: those ideal for

students entering high school, and those made with college-bound students in mind.

### For High Schoolers

We're not saying the graphing calculators in this category couldn't serve college students. But one feature you must insist on is that the graphing calculator you buy for your high schooler is acceptable for use on college entrance exams (see the "Will It Pass The Test?" sidebar).

One such calculator is the Casio FX-9860G (\$79.99). Its large display has dual-screen capability, and the icon menu allows for simple access to its tools, including trigonometry and finance functions, statistical analysis, scientific notation, calculus features, metric conversions, and basic mathematical

tools. Graphing functions include parametric, polar, sequence, zoom, trace, and conics.

The FX-9860G has a USB port and 1.5MB of flash memory. It runs on four AAA batteries (included) and comes with a unit-to-unit cable and protective slide case.

Another good option for high schoolers is the Texas Instruments TI-84 Plus Silver Edition (\$134.99). Its many loaded programs include Cabri Jr., Conic Graphing, and CellSheet Periodic Table Organizer. The TI-84 Plus has 1.5MB of ROM, 24KB RAM, and a USB port and cable.

HP's new 39gs (\$79.99) is also ideal for high schoolers. The loaded apps and tools give students more than 600 mathematical and graphing functions suitable for subjects ranging from pre-algebra and

geometry to trigonometry and chemistry. In addition, students can write and save their own custom Aplets to assist them in their learning and access an HP library of Aplets. The 39gs has 256KB of memory and built-in serial, USB, and infrared ports, which allow connectivity to other devices and wireless sharing of data with other HP calculators. The calculator runs on four AAA batteries (included) and comes with a USB cable.

## For College & Beyond

One function found on calculators ideal for college-bound students is the CAS (Computer Algebra System). CAS is a computing program that enables the symbolic expression of mathematical equations. Generally you'll find this feature on higher-end calculators that are marketed for college students and professionals. These higher-end calculators also are more likely to have 3D graphics, whereas less-expensive models are limited to 2D. While these more expensive models have many more features, high schoolers may not be permitted to use some of these calculators on certain college entrance exams.

Such is the case with the Casio ClassPad300 Plus (\$179.99). Users can operate the pull-down menu with the included

stylus to access 3D graphing functions, CAS, spreadsheet capabilities, statistical analysis tools, calculus functions, and eActivities, which users can create and customize. It packs 500KB of RAM and 4MB of flash memory, runs on four AAA batteries (included), and comes with a unit-to-unit connectivity cable.

The TI-89 Titanium (\$149.99), from Texas Instruments, is loaded with CAS and programs for performing calculations for calculus, statistics, physics, linear algebra, and engineering. In addition, many other programs are available for use with this model. The TI-89 Titanium, which has a USB port and comes with a USB cable, packs a whopping 2.7MB of memory.

One of the best features of the HP 50g (\$149.99) is its SD card slot, which expands the calculator's 2.5MB of memory. That holds more than 2,300 built-in functions, including 2D and 3D graphing functions, plus mathematical, scientific, and statistical tools suitable for a wide range of subjects. Similar to the HP 39gs, this model has USB, serial, and infrared ports for wireless connectivity to other HP calculators.

## shelf watch

AllSport GPS

Price varies with service plan • [www.allsportgps.com](http://www.allsportgps.com)



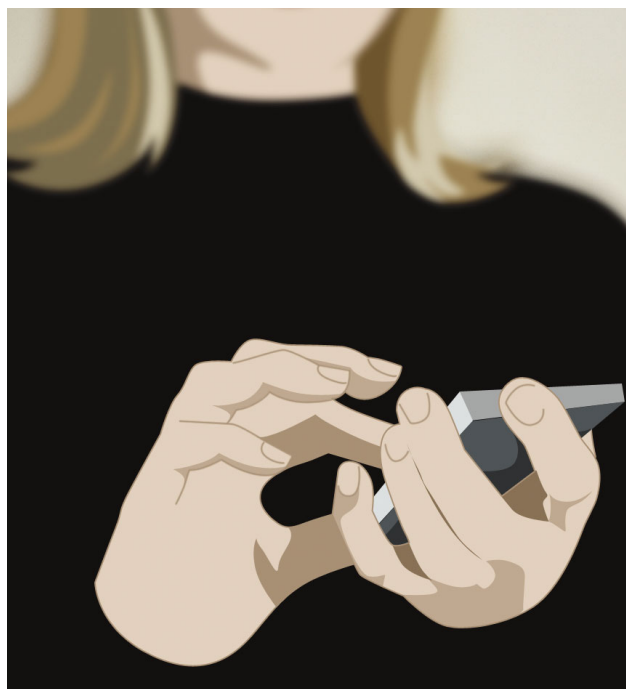
If your kids put in long hours doing homework, treat them to Trimble Outdoors' AllSport GPS for their cell phones. The program can help them clear their heads and rejuvenate their bodies by measuring distance, time, and speed; creating running, walking, and biking routes and storing them on their handsets; and keeping track of their best times and other stats, among other things. You'll probably like it so much that you'll load it on your own cell, too.

## Head Of The Class

When you think about how much is riding on college entrance exams, it makes sense to do everything you can to help your teen prepare for those tests. A graphing calculator may not seem like the most important CE device you could give a student, but it plays an integral part in the daily studies of math and science students.

Whether your teen is at the head of her class or just trying to get ahead, a graphing calculator will go a long way with her on her educational journey. **PG**

BY RACHEL DEROWITTSCH



## Will It Pass The Test?

**A**s the times change, so do the rules: Our kids are allowed, even encouraged, to use devices on college entrance exams that weren't widely available, or available at all, when we were in high school.

Before your teen takes a major college entrance exam, go to the test's Web site to see whether using a calculator is permissible. For more information on the SAT, PSAT/NMSQT, AP, and CLEP exams, go to [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). Look for links labeled Test Day, What To Bring, and Calculator Use. To learn about what the ACT permits, visit [www.actstudent.org/index.html](http://www.actstudent.org/index.html) and click the If Your Calculator Is Allowed link.

For other tests, such as those given at the state or regional level, check with your teen's teacher or guidance counselor. ●

# tips

## Buy The Right TV For Your Kitchen

### 1

#### Location, Location, Location

When thinking about which television is right for your kitchen, consider where you'll most likely put your new toy. For starters, make sure there's a cable jack in your kitchen and determine if its location will work for you. This shouldn't be an issue for most newer homes, but if you own an older home, you may have to get creative. Also, think about what type of TV you want. If space is limited, you might be happiest with an under-the-cabinet unit that mounts to your cabinet instead of sitting on your countertop.

### 2

#### A Fridge With A View

Maybe you're building or remodeling and need new appliances, or perhaps you're just looking for something to really wow the neighbors at your next dinner party. Either way, LG Electronics' ([us.lge.com](http://us.lge.com)) side-by-side refrigerator with a television built into the door should do the trick. This multitasking marvel comes with a hefty price tag—around \$3,000, depending on the retailer—but it offers many features and conveniences. The 15-inch LCD doubles as a weather and info center, including a calendar with anniversary alarm, digital photo album, and recipes. And the fridge isn't half bad, either.

### 3

#### Who's Watching?

Before heading to the local electronics store, consider how you'll use your kitchen TV. Will it be something watched primarily by one person while he or she prepares food? Or will the whole family watch "Wheel of Fortune" during dinner? Viewing styles dictate the type of TV you buy and where you'll put it. For example, if one person will be watching the TV from essentially the same area, multiple viewing angles aren't an issue. But if you think the kids may whine about not being able to see cartoons from their spot at the breakfast bar, you may want to consider a flip-down model with a swiveling screen, such as the Philips Kitchen Clock Radio DVD LCD-TV AJL700/37 (\$300; [www.consumer.philips.com](http://www.consumer.philips.com)).

### 4

#### Feature Frenzy

When is a television not just a television? When it's performing double or triple duty as a complete entertainment center for your kitchen. Many televisions designed for use in the kitchen come loaded with capabilities: AM/FM radio, CD/DVD player, remote control, cook timer, and more. This can be very handy, especially if counter space is limited and you want to get the most for your money. But if you don't need all these extras, you could just go with a regular 13-inch color television. If you want the most economical route, this is the way to go, especially if you already have such a television you're not using elsewhere in the house.

### 5

#### Damage Control

Simmering marinara sauce, greasy cooking oil, and sticky peanut butter, oh my! The kitchen is usually the busiest—and therefore the messiest—room in the house. You'll want to protect your TV by thinking about how best to keep it clean and safe from food splatters and sticky fingers. Although a white television may match your current appliances, remember that it will show every little thing. Consider instead a model in stainless steel, such as the Sony Under Cabinet LCD-TV DVD/CD Clock Radio ICF-DVD57TV (\$499.95; [www.sonymstyle.com](http://www.sonymstyle.com)), which is a little more forgiving and easier to clean. Then, hey, you'll have a good reason to upgrade the rest of your appliances to match.



BY JENNIE SCHLUETER





## Cook to *your* music.

Now cooking has a groove all its own—yours! When you listen to your iPod® with the iHome iH5™, you'll hear incredibly rich, natural stereo sound from our Reson8™ speakers. The iH5 even has a digital AM/FM clock radio. And it does all this while charging your iPod®, so it's ready to go when you are.

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For all docking iPods\*  
including iPod nano!



iHome is a trademark of SDI Technologies Inc.

iPod is a registered trademark of Apple Computer Inc., in the U.S. and in other countries.

\*except iPod® shuffle. iPod not included.

# music & movies

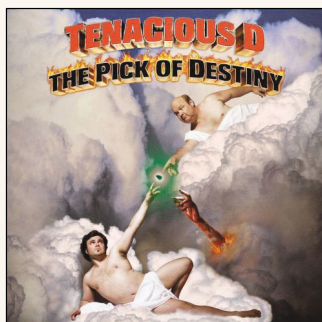
music

BY BLAINE A. FLAMIG

## Tenacious D

• Available: Now • Price: \$18.98

TENACIOUS D IN THE PICK OF DESTINY  
[Sony Records]



With song titles such as “The Government Totally Sucks,” “Dude (I Totally Miss You),” and “Beelzeboss (The Final Showdown),” how can this soundtrack to Jack Black and Kyle Gass’ upcoming movie of the same name go wrong? Well, maybe we shouldn’t answer that after sitting through “Nacho Libre.” Still, going back to The D’s all-too-short series on HBO in the 1990s, the duo has historically blended equal parts nonsensical humor with quirky acoustic guitar-driven tunes to form “The Greatest Band In The World.” By the looks of the movie trailer, “. . . Pick of Destiny” has The D in typical over-the-top form, with Black and Gass in search of a magical guitar pick that promises to fulfill their every rock dream and more. Although Black (as he showed in “School of Rock”) and (especially) Gass are fairly accomplished players, The D’s music is all about the lyrics, dude. Enjoy.

## The Beatles

• Available: Now • Price: \$18.98

LOVE  
[Capitol Records]

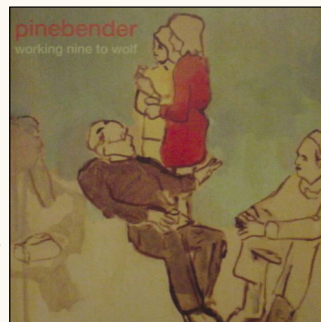


Former Beatles’ producer George Martin reportedly spent two years with his son, Giles, melding together pieces of 130 re-mastered Beatles songs to create the 26 tracks on “Love,” which represents the soundtrack to the Beatles-themed Cirque du Soleil show now running in Las Vegas.

## Pinebender

• Available: Now • Price: \$11

WORKING NINE TO WOLF  
[Lovitt Records]



Riding incessant waves of fuzzed-out guitar, crashing cymbals, and thick drums, “Nine To Wolf” is a dark, psychedelic, sprawling opus from Chicago’s Pinebender. Not for the weak of ear, “Nine To Wolf” is cut from the cloth of The Mars Volta without all of the experimentalism.

## Barry Manilow

• Available: Now • Price: \$14

THE GREATEST SONGS OF THE SIXTIES  
[Arista]

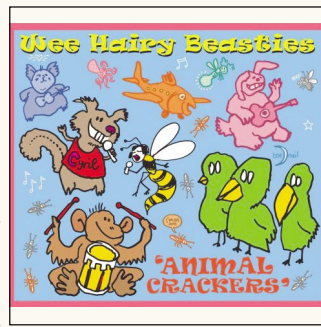


Scheduling a Halloween release for this 13-song set was probably a coincidence but also frighteningly apt. Bash Mr. Copacabana all we will, he’s a longtime hit with the ladies (including the writer’s own mom), and this follow-up to January 2006’s “The Greatest Hits Of The Fifties” will probably sell like mad.

## For The Kids: Wee Hairy Beasties

• Available: Now • Price: \$15

ANIMAL CRACKERS  
[Bloodshot Records]

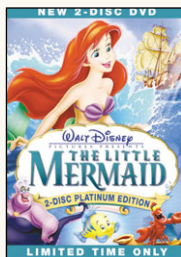


Wee Hairy Beasties is producer/musician Jon Langford (The Mekons, Old 97’s), Sally Timms (The Mekons), Kelly Hogan (Neko Case touring member), and Chicago’s Devil In A Woodpile. “Animal Crackers” is WHB’s magnificent, animal-themed debut. Expertly played and sung, your kids will soon be howling at the moon.



## movies

BY MICHAEL SWEET

**"The Little Mermaid" (2-Disc Platinum Edition)****\$19.99 • RATING: G • AVAILABLE: NOW**

"The Little Mermaid" was a huge hit for Disney nearly 20 years ago, and it's still popular today. Disney's just released a new two-disc Platinum Edition of "The Little Mermaid" that fans of the film will no doubt rush to buy. This version is full of DVD extras, including deleted scenes, an animated short, art galleries, and a DisneyPedia piece called "Life Under the Sea." If you enjoyed this film when you were younger, you'll find the adventures of Ariel (Jodi Benson: "101 Dalmations II," "Lady and the Tramp II"), Ursula (Pat Carroll: "ER," "Outside Sales"), Scuttle (Buddy Hackett: "Scrooged," "It's A Mad Mad Mad Mad

World"), and the rest just as entertaining today. The story is romantic and funny without being silly, and the soundtrack for "The Little Mermaid" is one of Disney's best.

**"A Prairie Home Companion"****\$19.99 • RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOW**

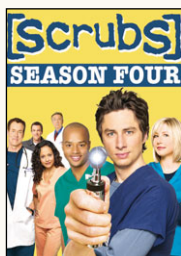
Garrison Keillor summons his popular radio show to the big screen in "A Prairie Home Companion," with the help of Robert Altman and an all-star cast. Altman nearly perfectly mixes down-home musical performances and behind-the-scenes conversation. Lily Tomlin ("I Heart Huckabees," "Nine To Five") and Meryl Streep ("The Devil Wears Prada," "Lemony Snicket's A Series Of Unfortunate Events") shine as the Johnson sisters, and Kevin Kline ("The Pink Panther," "A Fish Called Wanda") puts a humorous twist on his hard-boiled Mickey Spillane-type detective, Guy Noir. Virginia Madsen ("Sideways," "Firewall") literally turns in an angelic performance, and Woody Harrelson ("Anger Management," "The People vs.

Larry Flint") and John C. Reilly ("Talladega Nights: The Ballad Of Ricky Bobby," "Chicago") make a surprisingly good pair of singing cowboys known as Dusty and Lefty. If you're a fan of the radio show, you'll enjoy this film, but we think even those who've never listened to "A Prairie Home Companion" will get a kick out of it, though they may not appreciate it on the same level.

**"American Dreamz"****\$19.99 • RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOW**

"American Dreamz" taps into our culture's insta-celebrity zeitgeist and adds a dash of political satire to this light-hearted comedy. "American Dreamz" is a reality show—a

singing contest that mirrors "American Idol." Hugh Grant ("Bridget Jones's Diary," "Love, Actually") nails his role as an unlikable Simon Cowell-esque host. Dennis Quaid ("The Alamo," "Traffic") plays the foppish president who suddenly decides he wants to be more engaged in the happenings of the world. Willem Dafoe ("The Aviator," "Spider-Man") plays Quaid's Chief of Staff, a character who's clearly drawn from Dick Cheney. Mandy Moore ("The Princess Diaries") plays Sally Kendoo, the ambitious blonde singer with stars in her eyes. The film's portrayal of the show "American Dreamz" almost perfectly channels "American Idol's" vibe, but the attempt at political humor falls a bit flat. Still, if you dislike "reality" shows, you'll enjoy the way in which this film takes a swipe at the genre.

**"Scrubs"—The Complete 4th Season****\$39.99 • RATING: TV 14 • AVAILABLE: NOW**

We hope your local hospital isn't as bizarre as Sacred Heart, the setting for NBC's excellent medical comedy, "Scrubs." "Scrubs" is a perpetual nominee for various Emmy awards and in our opinion is one of the best-written comedies on network television. The show's main character is J.D. (Zac Braff, "The

Last Kiss," "Chicken Little"), a young doctor who's always trying to prove himself to his self-absorbed mentor, Dr. Cox (John C. McGinley, "Get Carter," "Platoon"). J.D.'s buddy Turk (Donald Faison, "Remember the Titans," "Felicity") provides additional comic relief, and Elliot (Sarah

Chalke, "Roseanne," as the second Becky) is excellent in her role as a neurotic overachiever who Dr. Cox likes to call "Barbie." Hilarity is always on-call at Sacred Heart, and the shenanigans that the cast of "Scrubs" participates in are one of the few bright spots in NBC's prime-time lineup.



# games

for you & the people in your life

BY ANDREW LEIBMAN

## Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime

• PRICE: \$34.99



RATING



Nintendo DS

Welcome to the island country of Slimeria, home to the sloppy-go-lucky slimes. Life as a slime living in Boingburg, population 100, is good. That is until a horde of baddies, called the Plob, invade the tiny island, capture your fellow slimes, and lock them in slime chests scattered about the island. This adventure game tasks you with busting out your buds and pounding the Plob using your Elasto Blast ability and your powerful Schleiman Tank.

• SQUARE ENIX  
• WWW.SQUARE-ENIX.COM

## Desperate Housewives: The Game

• PRICE: \$19.99



RATING



PC

You've just moved into a beautiful home on Wisteria Lane, and you're desperate to meet your new neighbors. This open-ended Sims-style game lets you create and dress your own housewife, husband, and son; decorate and furnish your own home; shop; cook; garden; play poker; and interact with Susan, Bree, Lynette, Gabrielle, and Edie as though they lived next door. Oh yeah, and you can be as bad as you wanna be, girlfriend.

• BUENA VISTA GAMES  
• BUENAVISTAGAMES.GO.COM

## TotemBall

• PRICE: FREE (Xbox Live Vision camera required)



RATING



Xbox 360

By now you've probably heard about the PS3 and Wii consoles' motion-sensitive controllers. Now, the Xbox 360 is getting in on the action with the Xbox Live Vision camera and the Xbox Live Arcade game TotemBall. This game lets you maneuver Pterry the Pturtle by moving your arms within view of the camera. It's your job to collect the musical totems scattered throughout the jungle to bring back the beat. Is flailing really the future of gaming?

• STRANGE FLAVOUR  
• WWW.STRANGEFLAVOUR.COM

## Xgaming Tankstick

• WWW.XGAMING.COM • PRICE: \$199

If the sight of a Missile Command game still sends your brother rummaging through his pockets for quarters, you'll understand why he'll be so excited to open this present. At long last, Xgaming has finally released one of its arcade-tough game controllers with two joysticks *and* a trackball, so playing old favorites, such as Centipede and Battlezone, will feel just like it did before Van Halen switched lead singers. The USB Tankstick (\$199; [xgaming.com](http://xgaming.com)) comes with a bundle of retro game favorites for PCs and Macs. The joystick and button parts even work with the Xbox 360 and other game consoles with optional adapters.



## ifrogz Custom Screenz

• WWW.IFROGZ.COM  
• PRICE: \$19.99

With silicone Wrapz, Bandz, and Screenz, there's something stylish to protect any iPod at ifrogz ([www.ifrogz.com](http://www.ifrogz.com)). Even better, you can use the innovative Custom Screenz ([ifrogz.com/design/index.php](http://ifrogz.com/design/index.php)) service to help a niece or friend put a personal touch on her Click Wheel. For \$19.99 including shipping, ifrogz will put a logo or custom artwork on Screenz specially made to fit Click Wheels on individual models of iPods. For a gift like this, it's probably a good idea to sit down with the person you're giving it to. Spend some quality time letting her arrange and upload her unique design using ifrogz's Screen Creator on the Web site. The fun you'll have together is the *real* gift.



## Directed Electronics Soloist Universal Media Dock

• WWW.DIRECTED.COM • PRICE: \$149

SIRIUS satellite radio subscribers are often serious about their music and news. The Soloist dock (\$149; [www.directed.com](http://www.directed.com)) reflects that passion with its awesome NXT flat-panel speakers. The Soloist works with recent Sirius plug-and-play receivers, including Directed Electronics' Sportster 4. It's also compatible with iPods with 30-pin connectors. The company was slow in presenting the Soloist on its Web site at this writing but says that the dock should be available at major retailers by the time you read this.



# ... & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS

# what they're SAYIN

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

We had a variety of responses regarding what types of electronic devices we're buying for our friends and loved ones, but the one common thread: We're buying them.

## Jennifer

GRADUATE STUDENT

Jennifer has a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with a Minor in Economics, and she recently started working on an MBA with an emphasis in Management and Leadership. She also works in IT Administration for a company while she's taking classes.

Jennifer and her husband Ag have a couple of big-ticket items on their gift lists, and they intend to use the gifts when they travel.

"My husband and I are looking at DVD camcorders and laptops for presents to each other," Jennifer says. "We're looking at a Canon or Sony DVD camcorder and either a Dell or IBM/Lenovo laptop. We have a few trips planned in the next year or so to include a few African countries, as well as Europe and several states in the United States."

She says they'll first research the camcorders online and then go to local electronics stores to see the models and compare prices before buying. She says, "For laptops, though, I go straight to the Web site (Dell or IBM/Lenovo) and check out the specifications. I don't need to go to a store to look at laptops."



## Lucia Grossberger-Morales

COMPUTER ARTIST

Lucia's a computer artist—not graphics artist. She creates interactive pieces, and she has samples of her work on her Web site (Cyber-chica.com); other pieces have been shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Mexican Museum in San Francisco, and in Liverpool in the United Kingdom. She's also designed light shows for Lollapalooza and for Peter Gabriel's WOMAD (World of Music and Dance) festival.

For gifts this year, Lucia says, "I'll be giving a digital synthesizer to my 1-year-old nephew. He has an amazing ability with sounds; he can recognize and respond to voices, even over the phone." Lucia says she has one that connects to her computer, and she's probably looking at a Casio so her nephew can create his own sounds (sampler) and play different instruments.

For her niece who is eight years old, Lucia is considering an Apple PowerBook; "the little white one" she says. Her niece lives in Ventura County in California, and Lucia lives in Phoenix, so she says, "I'm hoping my niece will learn to use the Photobooth on the PowerBook. I bought her a digital camera last year, and she takes pictures, so now she'll have a way to email the pictures she takes to me. She'll also be able to take advantage of the good software bundle on the PowerBook."







## Are you planning to buy any CE devices as gifts this year? If so, what and for whom?

### Daisy Li

#### EMPTY NESTER

Both of Daisy's daughters are away at college, and she says she'd like to get them their own washers and dryers. Every holiday and school break, the girls bring home bags upon bags of dirty laundry. She says, "I look at it and wonder what they have clean to wear and where they keep so many dirty clothes in their tiny dorm rooms."

Lydia is Daisy's older daughter, and Stephanie is the younger; they're at different schools, but both girls can drive home in less than four hours, so they come home a couple of times a semester, which Daisy says she secretly likes.

For Christmas, Lydia wanted an iPod nano; this year for her birthday, Daisy says she'll probably get her some gift cards for iTunes, among other things.

Stephanie wanted clothes for Christmas; Daisy says, "My husband and I had just given Stephanie a new MacBook for the start of her freshman year last fall, so we weren't going to get her anything big for Christmas." Stephanie's birthday is coming up, though, and Daisy says, "Stephanie hinted at Christmas that she wants a digital camera. She didn't say which one, but she knows her dad does all the research before we buy them anything, so he'll figure out a good one for her."



### Steffanie McCarthy

#### MOM

"Our gift list includes an iPod for our 8-year-old son Jack. (And once Jack has the technology, his two younger brothers will want it too.) He's always informing me that his friends have them, and I have one, so he should have one too," Steffanie says. "I think he already senses that music can define who you are, and I'm not sure what kind of music he'd want on it, but I'd be interested to find out."

Steffanie also says she and her husband are in the market for a digital DVD camcorder to replace their tape-driven camcorder that records only short clips.

Because they're currently living in London, Steffanie says, "I think if we get an iPod or any other electronic device, we'd order it online and have it delivered to family in the United States. Buying things in the United Kingdom is about twice as expensive as buying in the United States because the dollar isn't terribly strong against the British pound. Any electronic device would probably have to be Apple-friendly as we purchased an iMac before we moved to London."

Also, Steffanie says she'd love to give Apple computers to family and friends. She says, "We have an iMac that lets us teleconference with my husband's parents (who also own an iMac) in real time for free. The boys love to 'see' their grandparents on Sunday evenings (our usual teleconference time). It's a real godsend, being so far from them, now, to be able to see and talk to them. We've tried using other Internet teleconference sites, but they don't work as easily and clearly as our iMac connection."



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